Reviewed: Quake 3 vs. Unreal Tournament • IBM ViaVoice • Great Photo • REALBasic 2.0

MacHome

Solutions for Work, Play, & Education

Your Money Machine

Online Investing Basics
Financial Software Reviewed
Tax Software: It's That Time Again

5 Low-Cost Scanners Reviewed

Mac OS X On Its Way

Jerry Rice's Backyard Football

March 2000 • $7.95/$8.95 Canada

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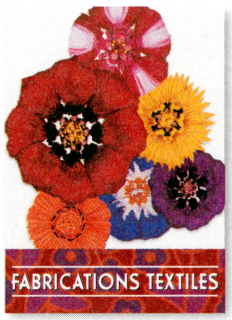
WITH OUR PRINTERS, YOU SEE THE LADIES DANCING.

YOU'VE GOT TO SEE IT IN EPSON COLOR.



Anyone can show you the flowers. But the textile company that created this catalogue cover wanted to show you more. Like the incredible fabrics worn by the 38 women you see here. Sheer enough to pass for petals. In a palette only nature could imagine. So what did they choose to capture all this color and detail? An Epson printer. The only one they could trust to separate the beauties from the blossoms. Which, when it comes to printers, is what separates the men from the boys.

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march 2000

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By Jeff Battersby

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Scanning the Horizons ——— 18

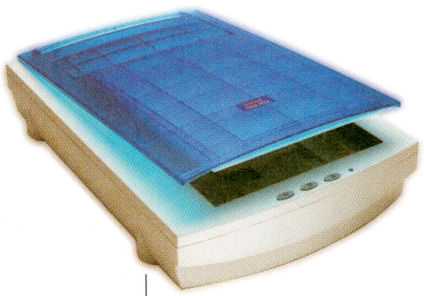
By Alex Handy

We round up some newly christened scanners and put their proverbial noses to the grindstone in a free-for-all, no-holds-barred scanner-fest. Need a scanner for under $300? Here's where you'll find out which one's for you.

Money Talks: The Basics of Online Investing ——— 24

By Molly Wood

Everybody invests! Just in time for tax season we've got the goods on online investing. All you need make a bundle on the stock market is here. Just try not to spend all that loot in one place



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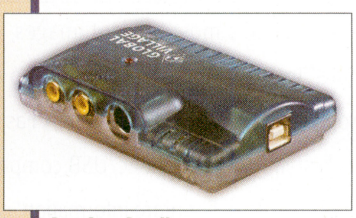
Brother's Multifunction World



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Your Office: Software

4 apples	MacInTax Deluxe
4 apples	Kiplinger TaxCut Deluxe
4 apples	Kai's Power Tools 6
4½ apples	Dramatica Pro
4 apples	Great Photo!
4½ apples	Action WYSIWYG
4½ apples	REALBasic 2.0
4 apples	ViaVoice

Your Office: Hardware

4 apples	CapSure with Reel-Eyes LE
3 apples	LabelWriter EL60
3½ apples	MyTV/fm
4 apples	Epson Stylus Color 760
2½ apples	Dazzle Digital Photo Maker

Entertainment

5 apples	Unreal Tournament
3½ apples	Quake 3 Arena
5 apples	Heroes of Might and Magic 3
3 apples	Episode One: Pod Racer
3½ apples	Galactica: Anno Dominari

Your Family

4½ apples	Super Duper Arcade 1 & 2
3½ apples	Legend of Lotus Spring
4 apples	SketchBoard Studio
4 apples	Brain Quest

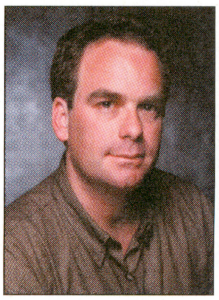
Our Rating System

5 apples	**Mac-nificent.** You gotta get it. No flaws.
4 apples	**Excellent.** Recommended even if it has a minor flaw or two.
3 apples	**Average.** Despite problems, still a worthwhile product.
2 apples	**Below Average.** Has serious flaws that limit its usefulness or fun.
1 apple	**Poor.** Avoid this product at all costs.

iMac/G3 Compatible USB

Indicates iMac/G3 compatibility

from the chief [Editorial]



The Big Curtains

I was tempted to write this Editor's Letter immediately following Mssr. Jobs' stirring speech at the January Macworld Expo in San Francisco. Steve always gives us plenty to write about with his easygoing stage presence and disarming banter.

Indeed, Steve spoke eloquently about the upcoming Mac OS X, and about new directions on Apple's Website. Stirring indeed.

Yet rather than write about what Jobs had to say, I thought I'd wait a couple days to see what kind of feeling I got, *deep within my soul*, from the show as a whole. All week long I took mental notes, compiling and analyzing the various aspects of the show as it went along, taking into account everything from the crowd size (big) to the janitorial services provided (pretty good) to the availability of salty snacks (outstanding) to the number of exciting new products (good but not overwhelming).

Once all the parts were in place, you see I could pronounce the degree to which the show succeeded. But as I went about this modern-day hunter-gatherer journey, an unexpected nuance caught my eye.

You see, exhibit halls like the Moscone Center (which hosts the San Francisco Macworld) are able to expand and contract to accommodate the size of the show they're hosting. It's not a complicated method used to do this, nothing like the elevator in Disneyland's *Haunted Mansion*. The staff simply moves giant curtains to create boundaries other than the real walls of the building. The curtains are so huge they appear almost as walls, stretching all the way to the vaulting ceiling.

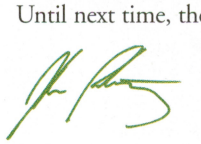
It hit me — the success of the show is proportional to the proximity of the giant curtain from the actual walls. You see, when the curtains are further back, it simply means there's more exhibitors (other than Apple) taking up more space.

Last year, the curtains had moved in quite a ways from the walls in some areas, and even though the five-color iMacs were introduced then, the show wasn't as great as it might have been had more vendors been there to share Apple's glory. The year before that, before the iMac? Well, I don't like to talk about it. Let's just say the curtains were up close and personal.

But this year? The curtains were *gone*.

In other news, changes are afoot. Jobs told the Expo crowd that he's staying on as Apple CEO, but he's keeping the "iCEO" name, because the i stands for Internet. And that's what it's all about, he says. We agree, so starting in this issue of MacHome, we're renaming our Connections section "NetLife," because the Internet is a part of life now. We'll continue covering what's important to you as a Mac Internet user, from projects to useful sites to e-commerce trends. Please, let us know if you like what we're doing with NetLife, if you have any suggestions — we'll listen.

Until next time, then, keep the curtains drawn.



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Hubba. Hubba.

Swell idea, this USB stuff. But add a hub here, an adapter there, and what do you have? A mess, that's what. If you want to see something neat, instead, check out the new Belkin BusStation™. It's a little tower that sits right on your desk. The modules connect internally, without the usual tangle of wires hanging everywhere. Need to connect to a SCSI storage device? Your Palm™'s serial HotSync® cradle? Just click a module in place. It's quick. It's easy. And, oh yeah… it's drop dead gorgeous.

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Write On [Your Letters]

Plan 9

Having read the editorial in the January 2000 issue of *MacHome*, where you discuss the whys and wherefores of Apple's including Mac OS 8.6 instead of 9 on some models, I'd like to point out the following:

Apple is wise to be putting Mac OS 8.6 on the new versions of the iMacs and G4s, simply because a large number of software packages are either "broken" under Mac OS 9, or have some needed functions disabled.

I thank Apple should wait a while before shipping its computers with the very latest Mac OS preinstalled, due to the rather large number of software companies that ignore Apple's warnings about fundamental changes to the OS. In the case of Mac OS 9, it will probably take many months for the industry to catch up with the changes.

An interim solution is to also ship Mac OS 9 on CD-ROM with all new iMacs and G4s (for those who want to try it), while continuing to have Mac OS 8.6 installed.

Martin A. Totusek

Verrry Niiice

I just got back from a business to trip to Paris and was delighted to see that several boutiques along the Avenue des Champs Élysées had iMacs displayed. What popped my o-rings was that in some of the stores the iMacs were used as props in the displays. Not as computers, mind you, but as trendy objets d'art, suspended at odd angles to highlight other merchandise. Doesn't that just encapsulate the genius of Apple's shape-changing?

Robert P. Lenk, PhD.

Eeeek! A Flasher!

In the January 2000 "Back to Basics" column by Chris McVeigh, some poor advice is given to a Larry Nichols about the cause of a flashing folder icon that he experiences when starting his iMac.

Mr. Nichols writes, "I have a question about my iMac. Since installing a scanner, I notice that every time I start the computer I see the Mac OS logo on a folder — but it alternates with a question-marked folder. This happens three or four times before the iMac finally settles on the Mac OS folder. What causes this and what can I do about it?"

McVeigh's reply, "Actually, you're describing normal behavior in the iMac," ignores that this is a problem that can slow down the start-up time for computer users. The solution is simple. Mr. Nichols needs to open his start-up disk control panel and click on his hard disk icon, which selects his hard disk as the start-up disk. The blinking folder phenomenon Mr. Nichols describes is indicative that the computer is searching for a system folder that has not been selected or was unselected at some time.

After restarting his computer, Mr. Nichols should notice that his blinking folder no longer appears, and his iMac will start up properly.

Zach Davis

The Age of Video Violence

Alex Handy reviewed the game *Tomb Raider III* in the January 2000 issue of *MacHome*, placing it just shy of your magazine's highest rating. It's interesting to note that you and your magazine are advising that we "gotta get" something that apparently contains graphic displays of simulated killing, murder, and massacre, using all sorts of automatic weapons. Wow, what a wonderful addition to my household that would be.

With the volume turned up (I assume there is a soundtrack to help us visualize all the chaotic killing, but you didn't review that part of the game), we could probably get a hair-raising, heart-pounding experience that would help prepare us, some day, to participate in the real thing. Does the game come with names and addresses of gun manufacturers?

Thanks, Alex, for letting us know where you stand on all this: "Rejoice in her killer instincts ... so durned fun." But then you interject a bit of sobriety in your gushing romp of advocacy journalism: "It's a bit disturbing to use Lara to run through a tribal village shooting people who seem to be defending their homes, but then this is a video game."

As if a technologically advanced, realistic 3-D presentation, where your fingers are on all the triggers and you're deciding who and how to kill, has absolutely no influence over anyone's mind. Has no chance of desensitizing anyone to violence. Is utterly incapable of glorifying guns. Can't possibly diminish a reverence for (human) life. Right?

Instead, all that killing and massacring can be seen in "dazzling graphical displays ... breathtaking ... you'll be treated to some nifty visuals." Alex, which of the scenes of carnage did you find nifty? You might have helped us really make up our minds to buy this game if you'd shown a screenshot, say, of those "darned pretty homes and villagers" just after they had been "hit with a rocket," as you so glibly described it. I find it appalling that you and your magazine are telling me I gotta get my home filled with the sounds and images of violence and killing and use up my Mac's memory with "*Tomb Raider III*."

Randy Miller

✍ ***Alex Handy responds:*** *Thanks for taking the time to let us know what you think about the mag, good or bad. We've had a lot of input on our coverage of violent games. That's why in February we did a feature on nonviolent games.*

The video games industry is not a pretty one. Much like Hollywood, the silicon cinema is plagued by appalling acts of violence in almost every genre of game. Of course, this is no different from Hollywood, since the movie industry thrives on senseless acts of brutality to make money as well. I personally feel that this is a byproduct of our society, one that can be no less disposed of than can automobile accidents or plane crashes. It's not pretty, but it is something that we're going to have to deal with because it's not going away any time soon.

As a games reviewer I would be remiss if I didn't rate games according to their gameplay, graphical excellence, and everything else that makes for a great experience. Sometimes games that contain deplorable violence turn out to hold some of the most entertaining and rewarding gameplay. The violent acts in any given game add no more to the games' value than do violent acts in movies (a boring film with canned characters and lots of violence is still just a boring film with canned characters). Games such as Tomb Raider *are fun because they offer an experience that we would not normally have available to us. I for one would much rather see the acts of Lara Croft, deplorable as they may be, on a computer screen rather than on our streets.*

Our Entertainment section is written for our readers, not their children. As such, we feel that we can recommend games that are violent without feeling any moral stings in the backside. Our readers are responsible enough to decide for themselves whether they wish to purchase a game based on whatever criteria they feel are appropriate. No one is forcing any of our readers to buy a game they feel is too violent. Even if we say "This is a must-have game" or "you gotta get this game," we're still not forcing anyone into the purchase of something they do not feel is appropriate.

I recommended Tomb Raider III *because it is a fun game. Even if it were completely bloodless, it would still be a fun game. I must also point out that the review made perfectly clear that this game is violent. No matter how much we like to think otherwise, our reviews here are simply opinions, and a difference of opinion is one that can rarely be settled. We're sorry that you feel this way about the magazine, but we would ask that you not take the entertainment section as exemplary of the whole magazine. If you take issue with the opinions expressed in our reviews, simply ignore them. They are, after all, only opinions.* MH

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newsWire [News & Products]

By Jackie Dove

The X Generation

Macworld 2000: On the Internet Path

Imparting a fresh vision for the future of Macintosh operating systems, the new CEO of Apple Computer, Steve Jobs, unveiled a preview of the hotly anticipated Mac OS X (pronounced OS 10), at Macworld 2000 in San Francisco. At the same time, he also unleashed Apple's new Internet strategy, designed to harness the success of QuickTime 4, Mac OS 9, and Apple's Web site and online store. Apple's goal? Turn www.apple.com into an Internet portal for Mac users with a suite of Internet products and services. Jobs also announced AppleWorks 6, an upgrade due out in February for $79, that will have more than 100 new features.

While not officially dropping the i from his title of iCEO (the i now stands for Internet, as well as, perhaps, iMac and iBook), Jobs is widely credited with rescuing the company he co-founded in 1976 — and salvaging the platform we all know and love. Such is poetic justice.

Year-Long Transition

Mac OS X is set to go into final beta this spring. It will be available for purchase by summer, and will be pre-loaded in all new Macs by January 2001, Jobs said, as the company orchestrates the year-long transition from Mac OS 9 to Mac OS X.

The new OS sports an interface called Aqua, which is absolutely stunning, but don't be fooled by its comely appearance. This powerful new operating system is a radical departure from the first nine generations of the Mac OS, and features preemptive multitasking (to give you a more responsive system), protected memory (to prevent one program from crashing your entire system), and more efficient virtual memory, among other features.

Apple provides three paths by which users and developers can migrate to Mac OS X: Classic, Carbon, and Cocoa. Classic means that applications written for previous operating systems will run on Mac OS X, but that users will not be able to take advantage of its new features. Carbon is more advanced, so Carbon-based applications are optimized to run with Mac OS X. The newest incarnation is Cocoa, which features an advanced, object-oriented programming environment. More than 100 software developers have pledged support for Mac OS X.

Aqua

The most intriguing part of Mac OS X for users will probably not be the system's Mach 3.0 kernel and FreeBSD 3.2 — the Unix-based new core technologies responsible for supporting advanced applications — but rather Aqua, the OS's elegant new interface. True to its name, Aqua has a blue liquidy aura that gives a novel look and feel to radio buttons, checkboxes, window scrollbars, and other elements. The

Hard Driver

You know you need more disk space. But that's sometimes difficult and expensive. For you, LaCie has unveiled the 6GB and 18GB **PocketDrive** hard drives measuring 3.5" x 5.75" and weighing less than a pound. Both give you the choice of a USB or a FireWire interface, and will be available in February for $399 and $749 respectively. But say that's not enough. Say you're heavily into digital video, music, and high capacity imaging, and you need more like 37.5GB of hard drive capacity. Have a look at LaCie's new FireWire drives. They can hold up to 120 minutes of digital video, for $659.

And if you're burning your own CDs, LaCie has a treat in store. It has unveiled the new CDBP 12432 CD-RW drive that uses a technology to prevent buffer underruns, thus ensuring error-free recording. The drive features 12x 4x 32x recording, rewriting and playback speeds for $549.

Lacie, 816-483-0755, www.lacie.com

Long on Memory

You know what they say: You can't have too much memory or too much hard disk space.

Kingmax is taking care of the memory part of that maxim with its TinyBGA module, which now comes with 256MB in both 144-pin SO-DIMM and 168-pin DIMM form, offering a 50% reduction in the size of the chip.

That effectively doubles the amount of memory capacity in the same space. Both are $400.

Kingmax Micro Technology, 949-454-9888, www.kingmax.com

The OS X Way

Aqua interface delivers translucent controls and menus, giving the system visual depth with drop shadows around the edges of the windows.

Another big change comes with the high-resolution icons. Current operating systems still use the 32 x 32-pixel icons designed for computer monitors circa 1984. However, Aqua will incorporate richly colored, photo quality 128 x 128-pixel icons, which will appear more legible on modern monitors. A new Single Window Mode makes the current window active while hiding all other open windows until you switch applications.

Mac OS X features a brand new implementation of the famous Mac Finder. The new Finder has a simple navigation interface that's contained in one window. With a new File Viewer, Mac OS X gives you three ways to view your file system: icon, list and column view.

A Dock at the bottom of the screen holds folders, applications, documents, minimized windows, Website links, and more. The Dock displays a descriptive icon representing each item you store there and holds as many items as you want — they just shrink to fit the bottom of your screen. And if you're afraid that they'll get too small, don't worry. Once you pass your mouse over them, they magnify to the maximum resolution. The new OS will also feature its own e-mail program.

i Stands for Internet

With a significant percentage of Mac users on the Internet, it makes sense that Apple would want to assume a more aggressive Internet strategy, and so it did by launching iTools, a suite of Internet services designed to make Apple's Website a major Web portal.

As part of the overall strategy, Apple also announced it had sealed a deal with EarthLink, the Internet Service Provider, which will appear as the exclusive ISP on all Mac systems from now on.

All iTools are free and available now, though services require Mac OS 9. Featuring a tab layout, the new iTools section of the Apple Website features KidSafe, Mac.com, iDisk, and HomePage. The new iReviews and iCards are also an integral part of the reformulated Apple Website, but they don't require Mac OS 9.

iReview contains reviews of Websites written by Apple. As of Macworld, there were some 250 Website reviews in various categories. Readers will be able to contribute their own Website reviews.

iCards is another take on greeting cards. The new iCards can be used with any e-mail program and appear directly within the e-mail window rather than pointing you to another Website or appearing as an attachment.

For Kids

KidSafe is a finely honed set of Websites specifically chosen as appropriate for kids. KidSafe downloads a software module into the computer's operating system that verifies each Web destination by checking with Apple's KidSafe server. Chosen by teachers and librarians, the KidSafe Websites number some 50,000 at this writing with 10,000 new sites being added each month.

iDisk is a 20MB Internet storage area that allows you to share information and

store files easily and privately on the Apple server. It puts an icon right on your desktop, just like a shared volume, or a second hard drive, and lets you transfer and download files. There is also a public file that others can access. HomePage lets you create and post a Web page with easy-to-use templates.

Cool New Email

There's a brand new e-mail address on the planet and it's nothing if not cool. It's called Mac.com. It can be used with all e-mail programs, but requires Mac OS 9. (If your name happens to be Steve, you're out of luck; Steve Jobs already snapped up Steve@mac.com. Must be an insider, that boy.)

Apple, 800-665-2775, www.apple.com

Get the Message Across

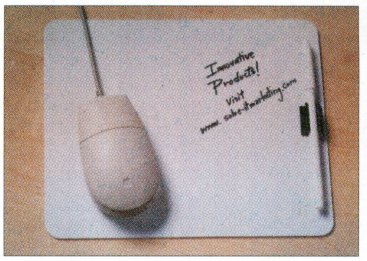
Yours may be just a humble, small office, but there's still a way to loom large to the rest of the world. Smith Micro has unveiled **HotFax MessageCenter Pro,** a software fax and voicemail system to help you manage phone calls and voice messages. giving you multiple voice mailboxes, fax-on-demand, on-screen caller ID, remote retrieval, and call forwarding. It will even page you. You can start with more than 150 pre-recorded greetings or customize your own. The package, which costs $70, ships with FAXstf Pro fax software. It will be released during the first quarter of 2000.

Along with your telephone, the Web is the most important business communications medium these days. With that in mind, Smith Micro has also announced WebCatalog Builder, a $100 eCommerce program featuring templates that let you create an online retail store. It is slated for release during the first quarter.

Smith Micro has also introduced Mac software for conexs, for $10, available from the company's Website. Conexs facilitates real-time Internet text chat and voice telephony. Video capabilities are also planned. It will also be available during the first quarter.

Smith Micro Software, 800-700-1299, www.smithmicro.com

Grab a Pencil



Contrary to its original intent, the computer did not create the paperless office (quite the opposite, in fact). But somehow, amidst all the high-tech gear, a simple paper and pencil is sometimes elusive.

The **Ergo Write Mouse Pad**, for $9, assures that you never get into that fix again, as half of the mouse pad's surface is available for writing notes right on the pad. While it's the same size as most other mouse pads, its "super" traction surface allows coverage of the entire computer screen with about two inches of mouse movement. The pad comes with a Dry-Erase pen, pen clip, and eraser cloth.

Solve-It! Marketing Company, 800-771-8348, www.solve-itmarketing.com

CD-RW Drives the World

Smart and Friendly has unveiled the CD Rocket Mach 12, a 12x CD-RW. The unit, which costs $499, features 12x write, 4x rewrite, and 32x playback. The external model (though not the internal) is Mac compatible and can create a full CD in six minutes. Are there times when a CD-ROM's 650 megabytes just doesn't cut it? Smart and Friendly has announced the CD Rocket Fuel 80, an 8x CD-Recordable media capable of storing 700MB of data or 80 minutes of audio/video.

That's 50MB more data than traditional CDs. A three-pack costs $4. CD Rocket Fuel 80 supports a wide range of formats including CD-ROM, CD-DA, CD-ROM/XA, CD-I, CD-Bridge, and others.

APS has also weighed in with its CD-RW 12x 4x 32x drive for $450. The tray-loading drive records on both CD-rewritable and CD-recordable media, and it can read most audio CDs, CD-ROMs, CD-R, or CD-RW discs.

Say you want to go really tiny. Interactive Media has introduced the KanguruCD-RW Slimline, a 4x 4x 24x portable CD-RW drive for $320. You can connect the drive, which weighs only 1 pound, via USB or FireWire ports.

Smart and Friendly, 800-959-7001, www.smartandfriendly.com
APS Tech, 800-235-2753, www.apstech.com
Interactive Media Corp, 888-526-4878, www.interactivemediacorp.com

Mini Big Music

If you've ever heard music on a Palm organizer, you know why no really sophisticated music software has been written for these tiny computers — they can only produce one tone at a time. **miniMusic's NotePad 1.0**, for $30, not only lets you compose in four-part harmony on a Palm — it also lets you play your music on a MIDI sound module. With a Palm and a sound module such as the $200 Yamaha MU-5, you can sit on a rock by the river and compose music with the full, rich assortment of MIDI instruments — pianos, electric guitars, tubular bells, and drums. You can also send the sound back out to some booming speakers and perform live, using the Palm as a synthesizer. miniMusic will also offer Mac conduit software that will allow you to transfer a MIDI file from your Mac to the Palm and vice versa.

The 5th Wall, www.5thwall.com/minimusic

Gee, You're Smart!

Say the kids need a low-cost, lightweight device upon which to create, edit, and store compositions, emails, notes, etc.

Enter AlphaSmart 3000, the new version of this computing appliance that lets them enter and edit text and send it to any computer for formatting or directly to a printer.

The product, which ships in mid-February for $199, features a new architecture that runs downloadable applets — small applications that run a wide range of programs and tutorials.

AlphaSmart 3000 is highly portable, so the kids (or you) can use it anywhere and anytime (in the classroom, at home or on field trips). It weighs only two pounds and runs on three AA batteries. It has an optional IR (infrared) interface that allows wireless transfer between the AlphaSmart and a computer or printer.

Intelligent Peripheral Devices, 888-274-0680, www.alphasmart.com

Stay Up-to-Date

Power On Software is shipping Now Up-to-Date & Contact 3.8, its contact manager and calendaring product, making it compatible with Mac systems from version 7 through Mac OS 9. The price is $100 for the boxed version and $90 for the download version. Now Up-to-Date & Contact is especially suited for a multi-user office or household in which group scheduling and contact coordination are important.

Among many other features, this software maintains complete contact histories of phone calls, correspondence, notes, completed items, and to-dos.

Power On Software, 800-344-9160, www.poweronsw.com

Canon Goes Mac

Want to enhance, retouch, or animate digital photos and then e-mail them to your friends? Want to get super fancy and create panoramas, movies, or 3D effects with your photos? Look no further than two new software packages on the horizon from Canon.

Canon Photo ($35) will let you perform basic image editing, offering tools to enhance, retouch, and animate digital photographs on your Mac. A higher end version, Canon Photo Gold ($55), also lets you stitch photos together to create panorama images, movies, and 3D objects from your photos. Both packages let you share your photos with others via email or print. Both are available online now, with boxed versions expected by March.

Also in the works, and planned for release after the second quarter, are two software packages designed to make life easier for those who use Microsoft Office: OfficeReady 2 ($40) and OfficeReady Professional. Both ship with ready-to-use templates for Word, Excel, and PowerPoint. OfficeReady Professional ($70) ships with more than 1,000 templates, including Word templates that let you insert images and perform basic photo tasks within Word.

Canon, 800-652-2666, www.software.canon.com

Home Net

The kids have the Mac upstairs, you've got the color printer downstairs, and you want to play network games with the kids from the Mac in your office in the den. Or say you just want to share an Internet connection with others in the household? Can all of this be done at the same time? They can, with two new adapters from Farallon. The **PN742 HomeLINE Ethernet Adapter,** for $99, lets you connect your Macs, PCs of the other persuasion, DSL/Cable modems, hubs, and anything with an Ethernet port to a phone line network. For those with iMacs (which lack PCI slots for regular HomeLINE cards), the **PN744 HomeLINE USB Adapter** allows you to connect to a HomeLINE network using USB. (iMacs can also use the PN742 using their Ethernet port.) This product will be available during the first quarter, but the price was not determined as of press time. For those managing a small office/home office, Farallon has also come out with the **PN940/5 Fast Starlet Dual Speed Hub** for $99. This is a new 5-port 10/100 hub. With it, you can connect Macs of various ages with conventional or Fast Ethernet, printers, and other Ethernet peripherals.

Farallon, 510-346-8001, www.farallon.com

e-Picture 2 Has Arrived

BeatWare announced the second incarnation of its Website graphics and animation program e-Picture with the introduction of **e-Picture 2.0**. The new version, which will be out at the end of the first quarter for $199 ($179 if ordered on the Web) offers advanced animation capabilities, including non-linear and accelerated tweening. It lets you create, modify, and animate 3D graphics, as well as import images from popular graphic arts programs. e-Picture 2's graphics can be exported to formats such as Flash, animated GIF, QuickTime and more.

BeatWare, 650-556-7906, www.beatware.com

Mac MultiMedia

Looking for high-end sound for Net entertainment, music, games, MP3 downloads, and more? Creative Labs **Sound Blaster Live!** audio cards, **NOMAD II** portable MP3 player, and **WebCam Go** portable PC

camera — are on the way in Creative Labs' first foray into the Mac market.

Sound Blaster Live! boosts the audio quality of MP3 and gaming. There are three variations: Sound Blaster Live! X Gamer for 3D gaming ($99); Sound Blaster Live! MP3+ for converting CDs into MP3s ($99); and Sound Blaster Live! Platinum for composing and recording music, gaming, and digital music creation and playback ($200). Expect to see them in the second quarter.

The Nomad II ($399), which will be available in February, supports multiple digital audio formats, 64MB of SmartMedia memory, built-in FM tuner with 20 presets, icon-based LCD screen, and more — all with a handy USB interface.

A NOMAD II player is also available with a 32MB SmartMedia card for $299, or you can get the player with no memory for $199.

Need a Web cam? WebCam Go, which also works as a regular digital camera, is also available in February for $149.

Creative Labs, 800-998-5227, www.creative.com

That's Multifunction to you, Brother

If you have a small office or home office (popularly referred to as SOHO) you probably need to do more than print, or scan, or copy, or whatever, and standalone hardware for each of those functions can get pricy and take up a lot of precious space.

For those in need of a multifunction copier, laser printer, and scanner, Brother is shipping the **DCP-1200** for $649. This USB product spits out 12 copies per minute, has a 250-sheet paper cassette, and can zoom and reduce from 400% down to 25%. It can print at 12 pages per minute at 600 x 600 dots per inch. The unit is also a 24-bit color scanner with a 300 x 600 dpi optical resolution. While it includes the TWAIN driver to support the Mac, it does not ship with Mac scanning software.

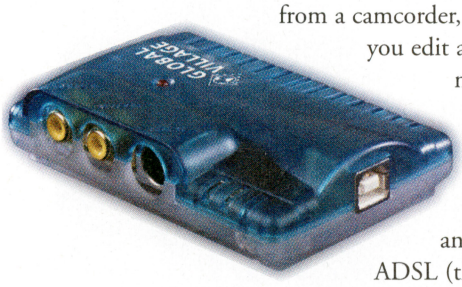
Brother is also offering two additional multifunction products that let you print, copy, and scan. The MFC-8700 is a 12 page-per-minute laser printer for $799, and is targeted toward small workgroups. Compatible with USB Macs, it offers 600 x 600 dpi resolution printing, and a 1200 x 1200 dpi scanner for black-and-white scanning. The unit's video capture function lets you link up your digital camera, VCR, or camcorder directly to print an image or frame in black-and-white or capture and store a color image or frame to your screen.

A higher end version of this product, the MFC-9600 for $899, includes a color flatbed scanner. This model lets you import color graphic images from hard copy originals or digital cameras, VCRs, or camcorders.

Brother, 800-276-7746, www.brother.com

It Takes a (Global) Village

If you're into digital imaging (and who isn't these days?), check out Boca Research's **Global Village VideoFX**, a video capture hardware/software bundle for Power Mac G3 and G4, iMac, and iBook, and PowerBooks running OS 8.6 or higher. With this suite, which costs $130, you'll be able to capture, edit, catalog, print, and share still photos or video snapshots taken from a camcorder, VCR, or DVD player. The software lets you edit and retouch images, arrange a collage or montage of multiple images, and more. The finished product can be used for Web pages, emails, screen savers, or photo slide shows.



Boca Research has also announced the Global Village TruSpeed ADSL (that's Asymmetric Digital Subscriber Line) internal modem card. ADSL gives you Internet access much, much faster than 56K analog modems, plus it lets you use your phone or fax on the same line, even while you browse the Web. This product is expected to be available for retail during the second quarter of 2000.

Boca Research, 561-997-6227, www.bocaresearch.com

Whose Video?

Looking for USB video products? Eskape Labs has announced its "My" line of USB video products for the Mac — **MyVideo, MyView, and MyCapture II.** All are slated to ship by March and will cost $240, $130, and $130 respectively.

Catering specifically to iMacs and iBooks, MyCapture II lets you capture full- frame-rate video. MyVideo lets you capture such video and also play it back out to other recording or display devices, like VCRs.

With MyView, iBook users have a way to give presentations by providing video mirroring over USB.

Eskape Labs, 925-249-6500, www.eskapelabs.com

FireWired Scanner

Graphic designers, professional photographers, prepress professionals, behold! Umax has introduced the **PowerLook 1100,** a FireWire scanner which two or more computers can share if they are daisy-chained on the FireWire bus.

The scanner, for $999, features a 1200 x 2400 dot per inch hardware resolution

and a 1200 dpi optical resolution and can scan slides, transparencies, negatives, photographs, and other artwork. You can even batch scan multiple images in one pass. It will be available in March.

Umax, 800-562-0311, www.umax.com

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YOU ARE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE BIG HOUSE AND A BIG HOUSE IN MALIBU.

YOU ARE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN 500 G'S AND 10-15 IN MAXIMUM SECURITY.

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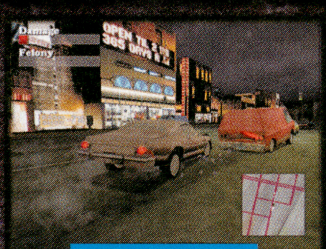

LOS ANGELES

Surveillance. Tailing. Deliveries. Heists. And serious 70's muscle cars.

MIAMI

Getaway through real pedestrians, traffic signals, traffic...and cops!

NEW YORK

No tracks. Just 4 sprawling urban downtowns from NY to San Fran.

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www.wizardworks.com/macsoft/

Biz-Cents

By Jeff Battersby

A Guide to Business Financial Software

So, do you have any idea where your business stands these days? Whether you're ripe for an IPO, heading to the bank for a new business loan or you just want to know if there's enough cash in your account to write that $10 check, you'll need accounting tools to clarify your financial standing.

There are quite a few business financial products available for your Mac, some we've looked at in the past and some we've haven't. From that collection we've chosen five products we think are worth another glance. OnAccount 2.0, MacMoney and QuickFinance are all shareware products designed to meet the most basic of business needs. BizBasics is a robust, full-featured program that will suit almost any business needs, and MYOB — which last year earned a MacHome MACnificent rating — is making another appearance this year because MYOB US (formerly Bestware) continues to update and enhance its already stellar program.

Tools of the Trades

Depending on your business needs, it may not be necessary to fork out big bucks on an accounting package. Granted, you don't want to use something that is ill-designed or poorly conceived, but it just may not be necessary to spend several hundred dollars for an accounting package if what you really need is a simple checkbook program that caters to the needs of a small business. That's where shareware programs like OnAccount, MacMoney, and QuickFinance come in. These programs, while not nearly as formidable as MYOB or BizBasics, provide excellent financial features in a small package with a similarly small price.

These packages do come with several major caveats though. Save for MYOB and BizBasics, none of the programs listed here provide you with payroll tools, which means you'll have to handle your payroll needs by hand. You may also discover that these programs, while certainly business-oriented, lack even the most basic components of a personal-finance program like Quicken, though they list for about the same price.

OnAccount

DASWorks' OnAccount is an invoice-oriented program designed to provide

small businesses with a simple way to quickly create customer invoices at the end of a job or at a point of sale. Like all three of the shareware programs, we looked at, OnAccount requires a significant amount of setup before you can actually begin using the program.

From the outset you'll need to create account files that can include everything from customers to bank and credit accounts. Inventory items, like bags of potato chips or boxes of screws, must also be added. You'll give each of these items a sale price and a quantity currently on hand. You can also give individual items a discount percentage and you can have the program warn you when it's time to order more.

Once you've completed the initial setup process you can create your first invoice. Choosing the New Invoice item from the Invoice menu brings up a blank invoice and a pick-list displaying all your existing customers. Once the appropriate customer is chosen you simply click in the Line-items field to display a list of your existing inventory items. Choosing an item and quantity places the item on the invoice and displays your tax, discount and total information. When you've finished adding items you can post the invoice to finalize it.

OnAccount also provides four rudimentary reports for Sales, Aging, Sales Tax and Payment. Unless you export report data, however, the program has no graphing capabilities.

For a program that focuses on invoices OnAccount has one maddening shortcoming: Invoices do not display or record any type of backorder information. And, if in fact there are backordered items and you post an invoice to a customer, that customer will be charged the entire amount whether they've received the item or not. OnAccount also has some non-standard design features—like buttons that take you to a new page without any obvious button to return you to the previous page—which may leave some users a bit flummoxed.

MacMoney

While OnAccount is invoice-oriented, Survivor Software's MacMoney is a checkbook-oriented program—like Quicken or QuickBooks—that requires a secondary program called InvoiceIt to create invoices. Upon opening the program you're asked whether you want to open an existing account or create a new one. If you create a new account you'll start out with one basic checking account. If you need any other accounts, like credit card or other banking accounts, you'll need to create them. You'll also need to create "Categories" which can define anything from inventory items to standard business transactions like telephone or utility bills.

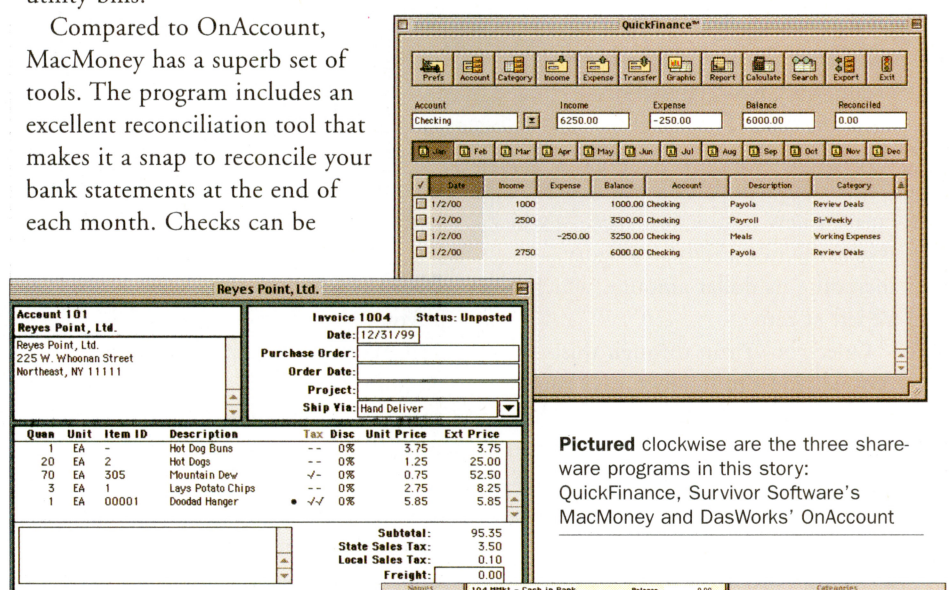
Compared to OnAccount, MacMoney has a superb set of tools. The program includes an excellent reconciliation tool that makes it a snap to reconcile your bank statements at the end of each month. Checks can be written with splits and the program allows you to make repetitive payments, like car loans or mortgages, automatically. There are also standard reporting and graphing tools as well as financial planning tools including loan and retirement planning calculators. Unfortunately, you may find some aspects of the reporting tools a bit disappointing. While the program does provide you with the ability to customize your reports you can't select a date range or create any reports based on a group of selected customers.

Like OnAccount, you'll need to create accounting categories in order to begin using MacMoney. This means you'll have to spend an extensive amount of time figuring out how to define your categories in a useful manner. Fortunately, the program comes with an excellent manual that details how to go about creating these categories, but it's unfortunate that there isn't a "ready-made" set to help you get started.

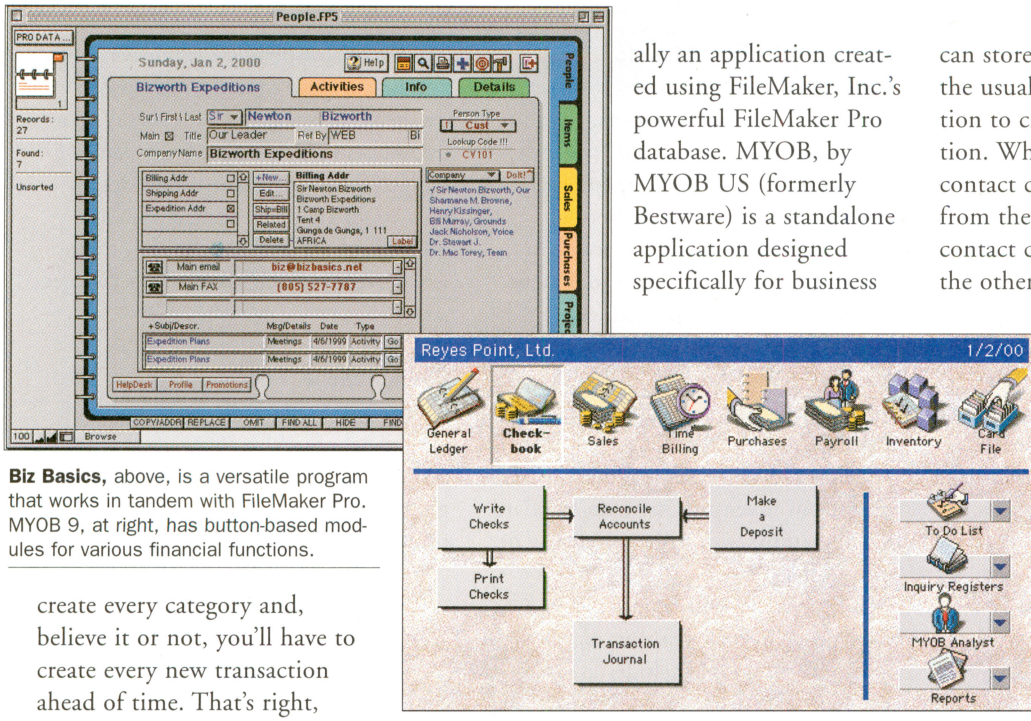
QuickFinance

Of the three shareware programs we looked at, QuickFinance is by far the most refined looking. The interface is graphically similar to most standard programs including a three-dimensional design and buttons for handling almost every command. In fact, QuickFinance doesn't really have any menus other than File and Help, so everything is really handled from the button bar. The program also includes some basic reporting tools — there's only one printed report available — and several graphed reports.

Unfortunately, the program's refinement doesn't go much further than the way the program looks. Like the other two programs, you need to manually



Pictured clockwise are the three shareware programs in this story: QuickFinance, Survivor Software's MacMoney and DasWorks' OnAccount



Biz Basics, above, is a versatile program that works in tandem with FileMaker Pro. MYOB 9, at right, has button-based modules for various financial functions.

create every category and, believe it or not, you'll have to create every new transaction ahead of time. That's right, there's no way to simply add a single transaction. First you have to create a new transaction type — which is actually just another category — including its dollar amount, which can be left at zero.

Once you've run through this process, you can finally create your expense or income transaction. This design flaw makes QuickFinance the least intuitive and the least useful of all three shareware programs. The program also provides no way of printing anything other than its very basic report.

Bigger Bucks, Better Programs

For most people, especially if you're running a business that requires more than an occasional check or invoice, basic programs won't quite get the job done. What's necessary is a program that can handle a wide array of business needs. Payroll, inventory, contact management, customer history, check printing and accounting all become necessary components of an excellent, ultimately usable business accounting package. The next two programs — BizBasics Accounting and MYOB — both programs promise to fulfill all of your business accounting needs.

While both programs are quite extensive, they're also both completely different. BizBasics Accounting is actually an application created using FileMaker, Inc.'s powerful FileMaker Pro database. MYOB, by MYOB US (formerly Bestware) is a standalone application designed specifically for business accounting purposes. Both are excellent programs.

BizBasics Accounting

If you've ever worked with FileMaker Pro, Working Solutionz' BizBasics Accounting will be quite familiar territory. The program was created entirely using the FileMaker database application. Also, Working Solutionz has designed the program in such a way that makes it possible for you to customize the program in myriad ways. This means that, if you know your way around FileMaker Pro, you can turn BizBasics into a program that fits your business like a glove. Unfortunately, the fact that the program is FileMaker-based also adds one tricky and annoying problem: you'll also need to purchase a copy of FileMaker if you want to use the program and this will add a minimum of $250 to the purchase price ($798) of the program.

BizBasics consists of a multitude of modules: Contact Management, Accounting, Check Writing, Word Processing and Inventory Management, just to name a few. Central to the way that the program works is the contact management module. This portion lets you store detailed information about each of your business contacts, and for each contact you can store specific business details, from the usual name and address information to credit card and tax information. What's more, each individual contact can be linked to other contacts from the same company. Thus, each contact card will display the name of the other employees in that some company and a simple click on the contact name will jump you to that contact's card. Once you've finished adding all of your contacts you're ready to get down to business. From the contact screen you're able to create new sales, make purchases, schedule appointments and create purchase orders or letters.

Once sales are completed it's on to BizBasics' accounting module. The program covers all the bases from Human Resources, payroll options and standard accounting. You can automate payments and handle split transactions in a single check all with the greatest of ease. If fact, you'll find that the program is incredibly deft at handling just about anything your business might face. Project and job tracking? BizBasics handles it. Employee reviews? BizBasics handles it. UPS and FedEx shipping zones? Yup, that too.

Which leads to an interesting dilemma: This program is so versatile and so detailed that it can almost seem overwhelming. Fortunately, Working Solutionz has taken care of that problem as well. Not only will you find an extremely detailed manual in the box, you'll also discover a second CD in the box that contains RealAudio-based tutorials for virtually every aspect of the program. And, if the basic training library isn't sufficient to suit all your needs, you can purchase a number of other more detailed tutorials as well.

MYOB 9

By all accounts, so to speak, MYOB is the standard in Macintosh business accounting programs. It's easy to use, incredibly detailed, links readily with Microsoft Word and Excel, and is fully

networkable across platforms. But the programmers over at MYOB don't just sit on their hands when they reach the top.

MYOB 9 has several new features, but a few really stand out. First on the list is pricing matrices for your inventory items. Now the program allows you to create a single inventory item with six price levels and five quantity breaks. This lets you give your customers discounts when they purchase large quantities of your products.

Second, MYOB now offers the option of multi-currency accounting. So, if you have customers throughout the world, MYOB can handle not only multiple currency exchange rates, but it also allows you to maintain foreign banking accounts and post realized currency gains and losses when exchange rates change. Third, MYOB lets you setup multiple Sales Tax codes. So, if you're doing business in states like New York or California, which have a multitude of tax jurisdictions, you can easily handle the problem without having to do tax gymnastics.

Unfortunately, one of MYOB's best new features is a bit of a letdown in the Mac version of the program. As of version 9, you can now email reports, invoices and purchase orders with the click of a button. Unfortunately, this requires so many steps in the Mac version that it's more of an irritant than a feature. If you're using Outlook Express, instead of simply being able to click the "Email" button and send an invoice to a client you instead have to click the "Email" button, which then opens a Jfax fax window (Jfax is an Internet fax format; see www.jfax.com for more info). You then have to save the file in Jfax format, open the file in the MYOB Viewer and save the file as a TIFF (Tagged Image File Format) image. Once saved, you create a new email in your email program and then attach the TIFF. Also, for some odd reason, MYOB has chosen to use Claris Emailer Lite as one of their default email programs — a program that hasn't even been available for nearly two years.

The Final Tally

Among the three shareware programs the standout will depend upon your needs: MacMoney is an excellent, well-rounded program, but requires InvoiceIt ir you need to write invoices. OnAccount stands out as a reasonably good program, especially if the bulk of your business revolves around invoicing. Unfortunately, even though it *looks* the best, QuickFinance doesn't really merit the time necessary to download it. But bear in mind that both MacMoney and OnAccount can easily be replaced by Quicken, which is a program you may already have, as it's bundled with many current Macs.

you don't want to use something that is ill-designed or poorly conceived, but it just may not be necessary to spend several hundred dollars for an accounting package

When it come to the big guns, both BizBasics and MYOB are incredibly versatile and should handle all but your most esoteric accounting and business management needs. In fact, they're both so good, the only way you may really be able to determine which one is best for you is to actually take each program for a spin, and of course to consider pricing. Unfortunately, the fact that BizBasics requires another program — and therefore several hundred more dollars — makes BizBasics a little less appealing. MH

Shareware

OnAccount

DAS Works
www.dasworks.com
$149.00

Excellent invoicing tools, intuitive interface.

Expensive. No backorder info displayed on invoice. No graphing capabilities.

MacMoney

Survivor Software
www.survivor.com
$49.95

Checkbook oriented. Excellent reconciliation tools. Allows split payments. Good graphing.

No pre-defined categories. No invoicing without another program.

QuickFinance

QuickFinance
www.multiweb.net/~edeleur
$20

Nice looking user interface, inexpensive.

Difficult program to use. Unintuitive design. Limited reporting. No graphs.

Commercial

BizBasics

Working Solutionz Software
(805) 522-2170
www.bizbasics.net (product also available from the web.)
$798 (+FMPro), $99 each addl. user

Powerful, extensive, excellently designed programs. Multi-user and networkable across platforms.

Costly. Also requires FileMaker Pro.

MYOB v.9

MYOB US, Inc.
www.myob.com/us
$179.95, $89.95 each addl. user

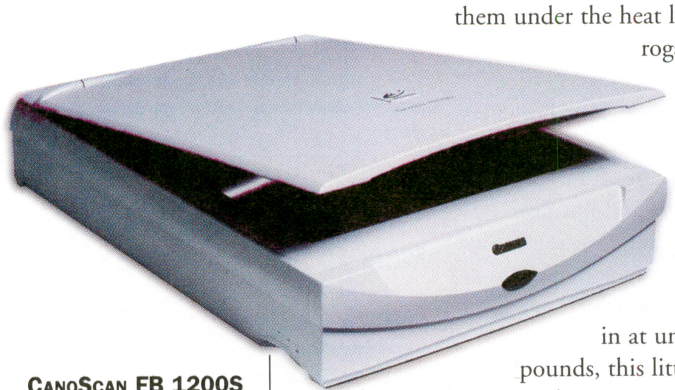
Multi-level discounts on inventory items. Handles multiple currencies. Email invoices, reports and statements. Networkable, multi-user ready.

Email option not fully realized.

Scanning the Horizons

Five Budget Scanners Face Our Judges

Scanners give you a lot of power. With a good scanner at your side, you can bring anything on the printed page up onto your computer screen. But for a long time scanners were the domain of the high end graphics professional. We decided to see if scanning had gotten any easier for the common man by putting some new scanners on trial.



CanoScan FB 1200S

By Alex Handy

Our panel of scanners includes five priced at under $300. We rounded them up and sat them under the heat lamps for interrogation. Our first suspect was the CanoScan FB 630Ui, a thin machine that's no bigger than a hardcover atlas. Weighing in at under four pounds, this little work of art doesn't need any external power; rather it gets its juice through its USB port. Its bigger, meaner brother, the CanoScan FB 1200S also found its way into our lineup. It's a bit more expensive than the $129 630Ui — $171 more expensive to be exact, but you get a lot of extra bang for the buck. Unfortunately, this scanner is SCSI only, so you iMac owners are left out in the cold. Sure, SCSI is faster than USB, and G3/G4 owners can get a SCSI card to pick up the slack, but USB is easier to deal with, since it's hot-pluggable — SCSI devices need to be hooked up when you start up.

Canon wasn't the only company we pulled suspects from. Two Umax scanners were up against the wall as well. The $179 Astra MX3 comes with a blueberry cover and an 8 1/2 by 11 1/2 inch scanning bed (The same size as all of our scanners). Its cousin, the $200 Astra 2200, shares some of the MX3's features, such as being both USB and SCSI compatible, but it also includes a transparency adapter so you can scan slides. Finally, we have the $300

Epson Perfection 1200u, a simple looking rectangular box of a scanner that can capture some incredibly lifelike images.

Meet The Scanners

Early on, we learned not to mix our scanners on the same machine. Having any two of them plugged in at the same time cause chaos. When you install your scanner, the first thing you need to do is plug it in and install some software. When you do, a lot of third-party applications get installed to help you do all those fun tasks scanners are renowned for: Translating printed text into editable text on your computer, capturing high quality images, scanning your face or other parts of your body, etc. At the same time, the installer program is placing drivers for the scanner in your System Folder. These drivers are the tools your Mac uses to have a conversation with your new scanner.

So what do you look for in scanning software? First off, you'll want an image manipulation program for fine-tuning the colors, running special effects filters, and copying and pasting elements of your images (Photoshop would be the ideal, but it's way too expensive to bundle in). You'll also want an OCR (Optical Character Recognition) program for scanning in text. The Astra 2200 comes with an exemplary bundle, including Adobe Photoshop LE (a stripped down version of Photoshop), Macromedia Fireworks (used to animate Web graphics), NetObjects Fusion (a fabulous Web page creation program), and Caere OmniPage LE (for scanning text). In contrast, the Astra MX3 gives you a more underwhelming bundle, including Adobe Photo Deluxe (a simple image editing utility), NewSoft Presto! PageManager (a less than friendly image archiving utility), and OmniPage LE. The Epson turns in a package of software that's comparable to the MX3, but the CanoScan FB 1200S turns in the slimmest bundle, weighing in with only Adobe Photoshop LE. The rest of the CanoScan bundled software is Windows only — a big letdown. It's smaller brother comes with some more useful Mac software, though, and unlike the 1200S, the 630Ui comes with optical character recognition software.

The Resolution Factor

While software is key, it's not the only thing to consider when buying a scanner. You'll also have to take into account the resolution. Resolution is expressed in dpi (dots per inch). The more dpi, the more detail your scanner can record. For the home user, 600 dpi is plenty, and if you're going to use your scanner to scan images for a Website, you'll only need to scan at 72 dpi: Most scanners can easily handle both of these resolutions with ease. But higher resolution allows you to zoom into an image and enlarge it many times over. The maximum resolution for our scanners got higher as the price increased. The CanoScan 630Ui, Astra MX3 and the Astra 2200 all top off at 600 x 1200 dpi (that's dpi across by dpi up and down). The CanoScan 1200S, however, can go up to 1200 x 1200 and the Epson Perfection 1200u hits the dizzying height of 1200 x 2400.

ASTRA MX3

CANOSCAN FB 630Ui

EPSONPERFECTION 1200

Another feature you'll want to consider is one-touch scanning. In theory, this should allow you to scan a document or image with only a push of the button at the front of the scanner. Unfortunately, this feature worked well only on the Epson Perfection 1200. The CanoScan 1200S' one-touch feature does not yet work on the Mac (the 630Ui's software was not finalized at press time, but we have been assured that one-touch will work) and the Astras required mouse clicks to supplement their one-touching.

ASTRA 2200

In Our Latest Installment

Installing a scanner used to be a time consuming process. Most scanners require a whole slew of software to run, and thus required a long drawn out installation process. Lately, how-

ever, the installation processes have been getting easier. Interestingly enough, as far as friendly installations go, the SCSI-only CanoScan 1200S, a scanner originally designed for Windows, was the easiest to install. The installer was very Mac-like and gave us no guff. After a few moments of installation and a quick restart we were up and scanning in no time.

Not so for our USB scanners. The Epson and CanoScan 630Ui were the least troublesome, requiring only a second attempt with the installation CD to work properly, but the Umax scanners were a genuine headache. The MX3 installation CD in particular is a dastardly dude, as it constantly caused problems. When you insert the CD it automatically opens the installer and prompts you to start the installation of your drivers and software. You can't insert the CD without it automatically opening the installer, so make sure you've quit all your programs and saved your work ahead of time. The installation process itself takes a lot longer than it should since each of the four necessary programs installs separately. Each time one program finishes installing, the next begins and asks you the same questions the previous one. It all makes for a repetitive process. How many times do we have to say we want to install the English version of the program?

Now that we had gone through the rigorous install process, we restarted and fired up VistaScan, Umax's scanning software, and voila! Nothing happened. The MX3 was nowhere to be found, according to VistaScan. A second and third install of the software didn't help. In the end, we had to remove everything that was installed by hand and reinstall from scratch. This also happened on a revision A iMac running Mac OS 9, but when we took the MX3 over to our blue and white G3, things went smoothly. One reason the installation went smoothly could be the fact that we installed only the scanner drivers on the G3, and cancelled this installation of the bundled software. Make sure you turn off all third party extensions and control panels when you install the MX3's software, too. Of course, you should do this whenever you install a new piece of harware, but we understand how much extra work that is.

The Astra 2200 was a bit more friendly. Perhaps because we had learned from the MX3 debacle, the Astra 2200 installation took only a few restarts and reinstallations to get working properly. Most of the problems we encountered with the 2200 were related to version problems with VistaScan; The MX3 uses a different version of the program and neither scanner would work with the other's version.

Yes, But How Does it Scan?

All these impressions are fine and dandy, but the most important consideration is how they actually scan! Any one of these scanners can handle optical character recognition, but since the actual recognition is a function of the software rather than of the hardware, it's hard to stage a fair competition. Most of our scanners came with Caere OmniPage LE, which performs admirably once you configure it specifically for each document. The only scanner that didn't come with OCR software was the CanoScan 1200S, which only came with a Windows compatible OCR program (poo-poo).

With black-and-white images, all of our scanners ran neck and neck. Only the Epson stood out, but the difference was barely noticeable. In the end, it all came down to the color image test. We picked two tough images to go the dis-

Scanner	Price	Connectivity	Maximum Optical Res.	Thumbs Up	Thumbs Down	Rating
Astra MX3 Umax 800-562-0311 www.umax.com	$179	USB and SCSI	600 x 1200	Good image quality, accurate colors.	Installation was troublesome, limited software bundle, one-touch scanning requires mouse clicks.	3
Astra 2200 Umax 800-562-0311 www.umax.com	$199	USB and SCSI	600 x 1200	Good price, Comes with Business Card reading software and transparency adapter.	One-touch scanning requires mouse clicks.	4½
CanoScan FB 1200S Canon 800-652-2666 www.ccsi.canon.com	$299	SCSI	1200 x 1200	Great drivers, gorgeous scans.	No USB, Most software is for Windows, one-touch only works with Windows, slow	3½
Perfection 1200U Epson 800-463-7766 www.epson.com	$299	USB	1200 x 2400	One touch scanning works well, great image quality, fast	Driver is clunky, some color issues	4½
CanoScan FB 630Ui 800-652-2666 www.ccsi.canon.com	$129	USB	600 x 1200	Beautiful, cheap, no power cords	Some color matching issues	4

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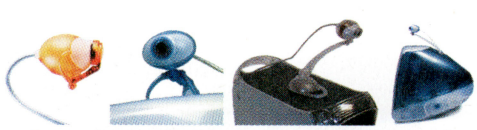

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The Truth is in the Details
When scanning at high resolutions, our scanners could pull out some amazing detail, as you can see here with an image captured on the CanoScan 1200S.

tance with these mean machines: a one-dollar bill and a 35mm photograph. The dollar showed off the level of detail our scanners could capture, and our photo showed off the color skills of our suspects. Not that we recommend copying money, bus passes or concert tickets other than for informational purposes.

The dollar bill test let the scanners strut their stuff at 600 dpi. It also allowed us to compare the color matching of our scanners, as the green color of a dollar is hard to reproduce. The Astras definitely pulled their own weight here, but they were both running at the limits of their resolution, as was the CanoScan 630Ui (which produced a surprisingly lifelike image). The Epson and CanoScan 1200S won out in the end, showing there is a definite difference when it comes to price. The extra $100 you pay for the Perfection and the CanoScan 1200S really shows up where it counts. But which of these two $300 scanners is the king? The Perfection narrowly nosed out the CanoScan in detail and clarity up close, but the CanoScan managed to produce a much more natural looking color on our screen. It's a dead even heat, and choosing between the two comes down to picking image quality or color accuracy, a tough choice indeed.

One way to help make that decision is to look at the speed of each scanner. The same operation done on two separate scanners can take wildly different amounts of time. For example, it took only 33 seconds to scan the dollar at 600 dpi on the Epson Perfection 1200u, whereas the CanoScan 1200S took 1:13 to do the same. The Canoscan 630Ui proved to be just as slow, taking almost 1:25 seconds to scan the same image. Even the Astras were faster than the CanoScan 1200S and 630Ui, both taking only 45 seconds to scan the dollar at 600 dpi.

But unless you're planning on starting a counterfeiting ring (bad reader, no soup for you, one week!) you'll probably not be scanning too much currency. We grabbed a 35mm photograph to test out the scanners from another angle. This time we scanned at 300 and 72 dpi, the most commonly used resolutions. At 300 dpi the Epson Perfection 1200u won out with vivid colors and an excellent amount of clarity. At 72 dpi, however, all of our scanners were acceptable. The only problems at 72 dpi was that one of the flowers in our image came out in an off shade of purple on the CanoScan 630Ui. This

coloring problem was not, however, easily noticeable.

But the image category leads into the only complaint about the Perfection 1200u. Sure, the image quality is top notch, and the Perfection is a complete speed demon, but its drivers leave something to be desired. When scanning an image with the Perfection 1200u, you must first open an image manipulation program such as Photoshop. Once there, you use the scanner through a TWAIN (Technology Without An Interesting Name) driver, which functions a bit like a save dialog box. When you enter the TWAIN driver, however, everything on the computer stops, and you are locked into scanning mode. Unlike the Astras, which use a separate program (VistaScan), the Epson relies solely on its TWAIN driver, And because the TWAIN driver is a plug-in and not a full fledged program, there are some interface problems. The scanning window for the Epson is drab and will look rather daunting to the new user. Interestingly enough, the scanners with the simplest and most functional drivers are the CanoScans. CanoScan Toolbox, which is used to get images from the CanoScans, is simple, effective, and looks inviting to both new users and old pros alike.

An interesting note about the Epson: when its lid was left open during a scan, it was able to produce an accurate image of the ceiling above it. Most scanners would behave like a photocopier in this situation: everything around the image being scanned would come out as pure blackness. This is a great example of how the Epson really is a cut above the rest.

Face the Facts

We put these scanners through a battery of heavy testing, and almost every time the results were the same: With the Epson in front, the Canon second, the Astra 2200 in third, the CanoScan 630Ui a close fourth, and the Astra MX3 bringing up the rear. It goes to show that sometimes you do get what you pay for. While the Astra MX3 is $179 and comes with a limp set of software, for only a few dollars more you can get a 2200, which comes with more software and a built in transparency adapter for scanning slides. This makes the Umax Astra 2200 our best bet for the home business on a budget. If you're a home user with a casual interest in scanning, the CanoScan 630Ui is both your best bet, and your best bargain. If you want some more oomph to your scans, however, the Epson Perfection 1200u is for you. It puts out some great scans and the picture quality can't be beat. If you don't mind dealing with some finicky software you'll be rewarded with a powerful peripheral.

DPI for the Eye These images from the Epson Perfection 1200u show the difference between 72 dpi at top and 300 dpi at right.

Our judges spent a good long time mulling over our results. In the end, we found that scanners are no longer the domain of the graphics professional or the computer nerd. They've come home to roost, and are comfortable in any home computer lab. It seems that scanners have matured over the past few years and are finally ready for primetime use next to our printers, Zip drives, and CD-ROMs. It seems only fitting now that scanners have become the second most popular peripheral for computers (both for PC's and Macs alike). So if you spot any of these scanners on the street, be not affraid. They don't bite, and they're now friendly enough to take home to meet mom. And heck, scanners have gotten simple enough for anyone's mother to use with impunity. MH

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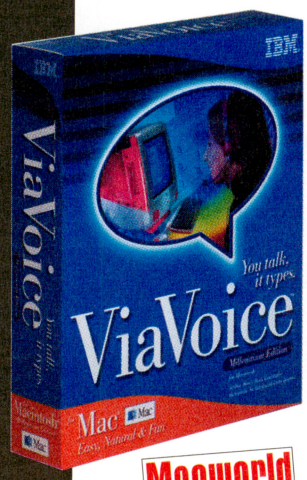

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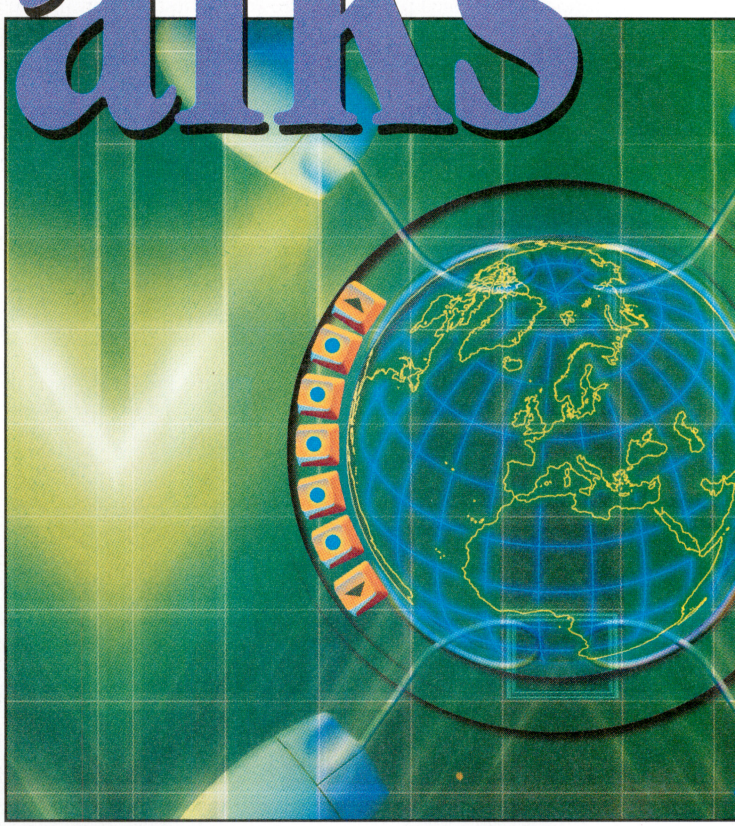
By Molly Wood

Money Talks

Covering Your Assets in the World of Online Investing



Incomes are on the rise, the stock market is booming, and the rising and falling fortunes of Internet-driven stocks have breathed an air of excitement into the once mind-numbing world of investing. Suddenly, everyday people are welcome on the virtual Wall Street, and the idea of stocks and bonds holds new allure.

And as investing makes its way into the homes of average Americans, it's using an obvious key: the Internet. Suddenly, and largely thanks to the World Wide Web, the stock market is accessible to all.

Some 48 percent of Americans invested in stocks and mutual funds in 1999, while only about 19 percent were investing in 1983. Eight million people actively invest online. Twenty million are involved in online investing, whether by researching and looking for investment ideas, trading, or maintaining a portfolio on the Internet. That number is expected to increase to 25 million within 18 months, analysts say.

The message making its way into homes these days, along with new subscriptions to the Wall Street Journal, is that anyone can do it. You don't need much of an understanding of bull markets, bear markets, dividend reinvestment, diversification, or modern portfolio theory. All you need is a little extra cash, a little research time, and maybe a discount broker — although even that is arguable.

Some analysts say such a saturated market could lead to a downgrade in quality. Neophyte investors may be unsophisticated or careless; they may artificially inflate the market or individual stocks, they say.

Chris Hill, director of media relations at the Motley Fool (www.fool.com), an online investment guide, cites a television commercial for a large brokerage that portrayed a man in a dentist's chair drilling his own teeth. The commercial, Hill says, implied that managing your own money was akin to performing surgery on yourself.

"I think it's insulting to suggest that average people are not equipped to invest on their own," he says. "I would gladly argue with anyone who tries to equate being a broker with being a doctor or being a lawyer. The mathematics that are

required to evaluate whether a company is financially sound are straight out of a fifth-grade math book."

Others say it's just a matter of arming the ranks of new investors with the right information. That's where the Internet comes in — for both sides.

"Because of the explosion in individual investors, there was a proliferation of investment information on the Internet," says David Eisner, co-founder of iExchange (www.iexchange.com), a site where potential investors can pay a nominal fee to get advice on specific stocks from more seasoned investors. "Almost all of it is overwhelming, most is disorderly and much of it is irresponsible. But in those billions of bits of info, there are kernels of brilliance."

Certainly, anyone can quickly make the transition from investment ignoramus to advanced stock market player. Thousands of Websites offer information, news, insight, and ideas to new and seasoned investors, day-trading cowboy types, market analysts, and would-be millionaires. The problem, Eisner says, becomes one not just of the Internet but of financial investment overall: Whom do you trust?

"Intelligence doesn't exist merely on Wall Street," he says. "There are people whose life experiences, work experiences, and investing experiences over time have enabled them to invest and outperform the market."

Boom or Bust

What's behind the stock market's move to the masses?

First of all, analysts say, there is the aforementioned growth in the number of individual investors.

"There's been a 30-year period where the number of individual investors grew slowly, but individuals are now becoming a far more significant element in the securities business," Eisner says.

Why? People are taking more control over the direction of their lives and finances, analysts say, and a boom economy contributes to greater willingness to invest. More importantly, Eisner says, the Internet has made it cheaper.

"To me the rationale was much more basic," he says. "It was the lowering of transaction costs to individual investors that was driving them back into the market."

What online investing has done for individuals, Eisner and Hill say, is free them from a stranglehold of brokerage houses, commissions, and high transaction costs. And it's made it more fun.

"There's a huge power shift going on from Wall Street to Main Street," Hill says. "And it starts with the information that is available online for free that five years ago would have cost you thousands of dollars, or you could have only gotten it from your brokers."

Now that information is available online for free, discount brokers allow investors to enter the market for marginal fees, and Websites like Buyandhold.com (www.buyandhold.com) and Netstock Direct (www.netstockdirect.com), for example, allow investors to buy directly from companies in which they want to invest.

Transaction costs at Netstock Direct and Buyandhold.com range from $2 to $3, compared with $5 to $15 at a discount broker — eTrade charges $14.95 per transaction. Also, investors at Buyandhold.com can invest in dollar amounts (with a minimum of $20), rather than in share amounts, and even purchase fractions of shares, to slowly build a portfolio over time.

The sites also allow you to reinvest your dividends — rather than receiving a monthly check, the money you earn from your investments is used to purchase more shares. The practice is known as DRIP, for dividend reinvestment plan, and is generally considered among the best ways to compound your investment. And it's as easy as surfing the Web.

There is an inherent difference between investing online and investing the traditional way, Eisner says.

"When you think of information from the big brokers, you think of it as credible. It's got a brand name associated with it, it's consistent, it's effective. But it's also slow, conservative, and dry," he says. "Investing online is different. It's fun, it's fast, it's cheap, but the information can be unreliable, irresponsible and overwhelming."

If you've decided online investing is the route for you, Eisner cautions, do your homework. And it will be worth it.

"There is information available now to allow people to make more intelligent decisions," he says. "There's no reason that people have to continue to pay the hefty fees and large commissions that they historically had to, with little control over their financial destinies."

Ironically, as investing has moved away from large brokerages and into individual homes, it's become a far less isolated experience, Hill says.

"You're not sitting at home watching CNBC or reading the financial section of the newspaper," he says. "Now you can go online and go to message boards and communicate with other people. Forget about just the ability to invest online. Just being able to communicate online with other investors is incredibly powerful."

A DRIP Is Not a Leaky Faucet

If you've decided you're ready to invest online, you'll want to find out some basic information.

An important thing to remember is that online investing is not synonymous with so-called "day trading," the high-risk, fast-paced practice of buying and selling stocks on a moment's notice.

Day trading is certainly among the most well-known facets of online investing — probably because of its reputation as a hyperactive business practiced by only the steeliest of investors.

In fact, Hill says, less than one-tenth of 1 percent of online investors — about 5,000 people — are what he would term "hard-core day traders." Day trading and

short-term investing has gotten more attention than long-term online investments, Hill says, likely because it seems glamorous and well suited to the mercurial nature of the Internet.

But the Internet has a far greater array of services than simple day trading, and many analysts say slow and steady is the only way to race.

Online investing can be just as responsible, careful, well-planned, and effective as investing through a large brokerage, and a little more fun, Hill says.

Start with research, experts say.

Eating a Hole in Your Pocket

At Fool.com, potential investors can create a phantom portfolio to get the feel of watching the rise and fall of hand-picked stocks.

Choose, for example, between eight and 15 companies in which you night want to invest. Create a balanced portfolio for yourself by picking high-, medium-, and low-risk stocks, then track their "performance" over a month or two. The exercise will give you a feel for tracking stocks' performance, and it will give you a trial run of what it will be like to watch your investment increase — and decrease.

Or, Hill says, if you're already investing through a broker, consider taking out 10 percent of that money and investing it online. Compare the results and decide for yourself.

"After all," he says, "how much damage can you really do with 10 percent of your money? Or rather, how much damage can your broker do with 90 percent?"

If you're not ready to start playing with your nest egg, Hill says, start with your retirement plan. If you've got a 401K at work and your employer is matching your monthly contribution, you can be investing free money, as carefully or carelessly as you like.

Watch out for misinformation. It's no secret that the Internet can have you chasing your tail on occasion. But Hill advises that investors verify any information they receive — no matter what the source.

"Say a rumor makes its way onto CNBC, into a column in the Wall Street Journal, or onto a message board at the Motley Fool," he says. "If you read it in the column or see it on TV, who are you going to be able to bounce the information off of? If someone posts a rumor on a message board, 10 people can immediately follow up."

Try to keep your head, Eisner advises.

"New investors shouldn't get caught up in it," Eisner says. "It's serious. If they're going to treat part of it as a game then they should recognize that that small part is a game but treat the rest of their net worths responsibly."

"Maybe the further caution or warning would be to take it a little bit slowly," he says. "Don't assume that the first success — or failure for that matter — is going to be easily replicable."

Finally, just do it! Never before in history has it been so easy — and so profitable — to be part of the stock market. Money, Hill says, has long been a taboo subject in America, and financial institutions have made the stock market a well-kept secret — and a privilege of very few. Well, trust the Internet to bring even this bastion of secrecy, intrigue, mystery, and confusion home.

Now is the time, Hill says. "Investing has reached this status now where it's such huge news that everyone is talking about it," he says. "It's a golden age for an individual investor right now." MH

Online Investing

A Destination Guide

Sites to visit if you're considering online trading:

www.fool.com
The Motley Fool Website. Dedicated to the independent investor, the Fools offer tips, trades, picks, advice on how to get started and what to do once you're in up to your neck. You can also fetch stock quotes, maintain a portfolio, or test your budding acumen with a phantom portfolio.

www.iexchange.com
iExchange analysts track stock picks and, for a nominal fee, you can check your choice against a proven winner. Each armchair analyst — folks from all areas and walks of life who are or are becoming seasoned investors — has his or her track record posted on the site so you can compare your choices against theirs.

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By Molly Wood

On My Own

Becoming a Work-At-Home Warrior: A Guide to Going SOHO

It's getting on toward spring, the time of year when people start throwing out the old, and ushering in the new. Some are stopping at new haircuts, or whisking couches, but still others are making a much bigger leap. All across America, folks are saying good-bye to fluorescent lights, giving up on water-cooler gatherings, and kissing away interoffice memos in favor of a new revolution: Working At Home.

It's SOHO (Small Office, Home Office) baby – free agency, and it's emptying out corporate offices at a shocking rate. This month, we devote our Home Office section to the phenomenon that's spawned a new vernacular, an online community, newsletters, books, and articles — and has bosses across the country (including ours!) fielding emails from would-be telecommuters.

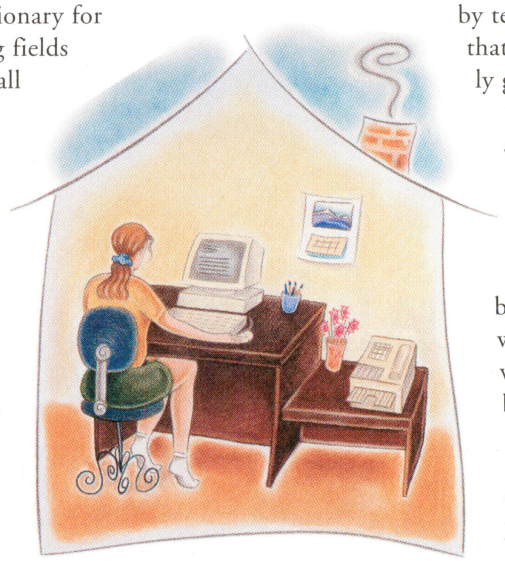
"It's not a work-style, it's a lifestyle choice."

Jeff Zbar, journalist, author, and speaker, is sitting around the house in South Florida. He's wearing torn shorts, a tank top, no shoes or socks, and he says he hasn't showered on this particular day. He's expecting his three kids home from school any second, and warns that things "might get a little noisy" when they come bounding in the front door.

Don't be fooled. Zbar is working, and he's working hard.

"I'm the poster boy for the typical slacker home office worker," he jokes, knowing he's anything but. In the past 10 years, Zbar has built a successful writing business for himself and become a missionary for the burgeoning fields of SOHO (small office/home office) and teleworking.

He founded an organization called Goin' SOHO! (www.goinsoho.com) that promotes alternative work arrangements including working from home and teleworking. He contributes regularly to a host of publications, including the *Fort Lauderdale Sun-Sentinel* (www.sun-sentinel.com), publishes a bi-weekly electronic magazine of home office success stories on the Goin' SOHO! site, and is the author of a book of tips for working at home called "Home Office Know-How" (Upstart Publishing).



But if Zbar comes across as a charismatic cult leader, his flock is growing.

According to recent estimates, people in America are starting home businesses at a rate of 2 million per year. Telecommuters, or "teleworkers," number at least 15.7 million in the U.S., up from 4 million in 1990.

A 1998 study found that more than 31 percent of American households have a home office, and fully 26 percent of those support a home-based business. Nine percent are used by telecommuters, with that number apparently growing daily.

Enabled almost solely by technology, working at home, often considered a luxury at best, and excuse to watch daytime television at worst, has become a reality for millions.

Contract With America

For Zbar, it's Goin' SOHO!. For Dan Pink, a former speechwriter for such political luminaries as Vice President Al Gore and U.S. Secretary of Labor Robert B. Reich, it's free agency.

Pink, who struck out on his own about two-and-a-half years ago, is a contributing editor at Fast Company and wrote a cover story in 1998 called "Free Agent Nation." The article kicked off much of the attention the

phenomenon has since received — and while Pink avoids the term himself, it was in the days after his article appeared that free agency was dubbed a "silent revolution."

For Pink, as with the millions joining the cause, free agency is about riding into the sunset of self-actualization atop the painted pony of working at home. And in the course of traveling the country, interviewing other work-at-home folks, Pink says messianic fervor is common.

Certainly, he agrees, technology has been a major factor in the exodus from office to home office. But it's a changing philosophy, a shifting of loyalties, that sparked the change in the first place, he says.

"There was a breakdown of the social contract of work that existed in this country, where the individual would give loyalty to a company and a company would give loyalty to an individual in return," he says.

Pink, who authors an online newsletter called Free Agent Nation (www.freeagentnation.com) says comapnies are increasingly short-lived, while the employees themselves aren't going anywhere.

"Now, with the shrinking of the life of organizations and the increased longevity of humans, almost any American can expect to outlive any company for which he or she works," he says.

Then there's the economics of it all.

"People are reasonably well off, even deep into the middle class. If you have this expectation of some level of modest comfort, then work is not merely a way to make money, it's a way to make meaning," he says. "It's hard to find that kind of meaning inside a cubicle, which is inside a department, which is inside a division, which is inside some large company."

A Short Pier

For many, it seems like a long way from the cubicle to the comforts of home, but Zbar and others say it's not such an impossible leap.

For most of you, teleworking is the easiest way to get introduced to the idea of working at home. You're not completely adrift, there's still an obvious network of support, and you might (but not always, surprisingly enough!) get some of that home office equipment paid for.

"If someone is a lawyer, an architect, a graphic designer, a computer consultant, and now they're doing that job at One Corporate Plaza downtown," Zbar says, "teleworking is a great way to help get over some of those initial roadblocks."

Of course, if your initial roadblock is your boss, you might have some fast talking to do. Zbar and Pink agree that the mentality of managers hired to "keep an eye" on workers can be difficult to budge — but change is on the horizon.

> **"If you have this** expectation of some kind of level of modest comfort, then work is not merely a way to make money, it's a way to make meaning."
>
> – Dan Pink, Free Agent Nation

"I don't think you should combat it," Pink says. "If the most talented people have the ability to go out on their own, it just ups the ante for treating talented people the best you can. If you treat people more and more like free agents, you're more likely to keep people around."

Those who get that precious permission to work from home often have many more hurdles to face, Zbar says. Among those are convincing both managers and co-workers you're not couch-surfing, sleeping in late, and spending afternoons at the beach.

"People need to make the stigma a little less prevalent — as a teleworker you face the stigma and the jeers of your peers, as an at-home entrepreneur I face it," Zbar says. "The only way to indoctrinate those around us to the success of working from home is by being successful. Prove to your boss that you can be successful. Show them research that proves that (a company) has x-number of employees, and they're 15 to 35 percent more productive on the days they telework."

While it can be a good motivator for striking out on your own, teleworking doesn't have to inspire the entrepreneurial spirit. It does, however, inspire a desire to perform, simply in the hopes you'll never have to go back to the office, Zbar says.

"You're going to find a different mentality – teleworkers have a mentality that they need to prove their success, or it will be taken away," he says. "You will feel empowered, you will be thankful to the boss, and you'll want to do the best you can because you'll never want to lose it again."

The Dark Side

That's not to say there aren't obstacles once you're set up at home.

Procrastination, isolation, lack of motivation, overworking — all can cripple the newly installed SOHO worker or free agent at various points. The fact is, if you decide to work at home, you'll be alone. Sure, you'll have the phone, email, and instant messaging, but it's up to you to get the project done — well, on time, within budget, et cetera.

Get the tools, get the routine, and get the habits down fast, Zbar advises.

"It means getting out of bed and walking straight to the office," he says. "Make sure you're walking into a work space that is welcoming and professional. It ain't the kitchen table with your papers spread out, because the fridge will be a magnet that you cannot resist."

"No one is going to jump into this and boom — come out with all six

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cylinders pumping," he says. "You will need to phase into this."

And starting your own home business can be even more frightening, Pink says. You're on your own, and you're going to find out fast whether you can make it work.

"You really expose what your value is," Pink says. "You know that in any company, there are people worth more or less than they're getting. In free agency that's exposed right away. For some, that exposure to the market is good news, for others it's not."

Think hard before you make the jump, Zbar says. Find out whether you really want to work from home, or whether you just want to be at home.

"It can be really hard to cut the tie, depending on your personality," Zbar says. "If you're a gregarious type, you might have a hard time."

Taking Care of You

Home workers tend toward a variety of obstacles, and they can strike at any time, the gurus say. It's not all you might expect, either. One of the worst habits free agents develop is working too hard, experts say. It's too easy, for example, not to "leave" the office when you never really "go" to the office.

Then there's the opposite trouble — how to motivate yourself on those days when you'd rather stay in bed?

Well, Zbar says, don't overdo it, but one of the benefits of working at home is taking care of yourself.

"There are days when you'll feel overwhelmed, overburdened, and you can relax, take a personal sick day, a personal leave day, and decompress," he says. "In the summertime, I go swimming every day with my kids. My voicemail will answer my calls, and I'll call back when I'm done."

Meanwhile, he says, motivate yourself with plenty of work, stay connected — you got that DSL connection, second and third phone line, voice mail, and brand new ISP for a reason.

Think about it before you do it, Zbar says. Don't jump in blind.

"Foster the mindset to work from home," he says. "Realize the psychological barriers. Have the right technology, the right tools, the right workspace."

No one is going to jump into this and boom — come out with all six cylinders pumping. You will need to phase into this."

– Jeff Zbar, Goin' SOHO!

If indeed you decide goin' SOHO is for you, the movement's converts say you won't regret it.

Nirvana

Pink says his research, including an online census, indicates that four out of five people who work at home say they would never go back. Studies from the Bureau of Labor Statistics have found much the same.

"The vast majority of people prefer it," Pink asserts. "It's more humane. It's much more in tune with what humans are and what they aspire to be: free-thinking autonomous people who can plan for themselves and arrange their lives."

As for himself, Pink says, "This is the only way to fly."

Our ever-improving economy, the changing nature of jobs in America — those geared more toward the collection and dissemination of art and information — and technology have combined to make it a nearly perfect time to cut the tie, experts say.

"It's a leap of faith," Zbar says. "But one of the key points in my book is get psyched! This is a promotion, not a demotion. It's a lifestyle choice. This is also an opportunity for us to become evangelical."

Evangelical they are. But you never know: Those free agents just might have the healing touch. MH

By David Weiss

It's That Time Again?

MacInTax Vs. Kiplinger Tax Cut

Funny how "that time" has a way of sneaking up on you. Preparing your taxes is not a fun thing to do, even if you are expecting a return. But tax-preparation software can make it much more palatable. So let's roll up our sleeves and take a look at the titans of tax software, Intuit's MacInTax and Block Financial's Kiplinger TaxCut.

Both programs present you with an extended interview about last year's tax situation, and then perform the necessary calculations that result in a completed tax return that you can mail in or file electronically. Both provide sophisticated error-checking functions that not only alert you to errors and suggest ways to fix them, but also offer ideas on how you can improve your overall financial picture by taking advantage of laws that affect your particular situation.

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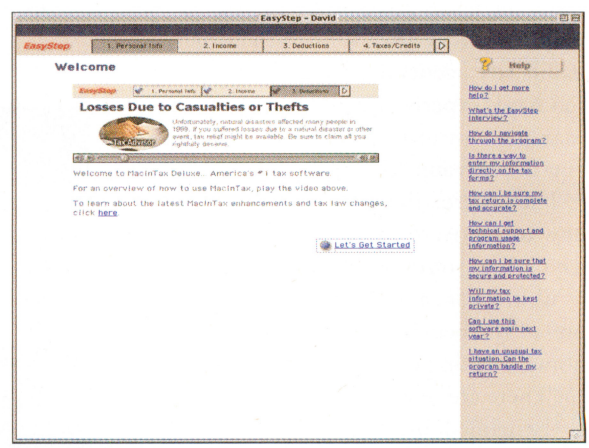
With MacInTax "regular" ($30), you miss out on the movies that grace the screens of the interview, providing you with condensed summaries of important tax concepts, and you don't get the state forms. MacInTax Deluxe, for $50, does contain the movies, and it also gives you a copy of the state portion. The $65 MacInTax Home & Business contains all of what's in MacInTax Deluxe, with the addition of forms specifically geared to business owners. If you work on your own, as a freelancer, MacInTax Deluxe is perfectly suitable — It contains all the forms and background information you'll need to fill out Schedule Cs and itemize your deductions. Kiplinger TaxCut has the same three versions — a "regular," a Deluxe, and a Home & Business version, but for lower prices — $15, $40, and $70, with rebates that drop the prices down to $8, $25, and $50. And as with the Deluxe version of MacInTax, the Deluxe version of TaxCut will cover freelancers. TaxCut's Deluxe version will also provide you with a free module for state taxes.



MacInTax sports a spiffy new interface.

Starting Out

The main MacInTax screen is divided into three general areas — the central area is where the interview takes place, along the top is a series of buttons for jumping around to different areas of the interview, and along the right are frequently asked questions specific to each screen of the interview, as well as a Help button that calls up a wealth of information about the program and taxes in general. As you answer the interview questions, you see the information appear on the appropriate tax form, which appears in a window at the bottom of the screen. If you want, you can turn this window off.

TaxCut has a similar design, but instead makes use of tabs, like the ones on file folders, to indicate the three main sections of the interview — Prepare, Review, and File. TaxCut also presents you with frequently asked questions along the right hand column, a feature lacking in last year's version. On

the right you'll also find buttons for getting around: A help button, which calls up not only program help but also tax advice from the editors of *Kiplinger* magazine; a Navigator, which allows you to jump to any topic in the interview, and also shows your progress by checking off the topics you've completed; and also buttons for jumping to the tax forms themselves. A little "i" floats above each field you're working on, and when you click on it, it brings up a box that tells you where the information is going, and where the information is coming from — that is, whether you entered it yourself or whether it got carried over from another field. This doesn't seem particularly valuable to me, but this little info box also allows you to mark an entry as "tentative," and the program will remind you that you need to plug in the real number before you file. With MacInTax, you can do this via a menu command.

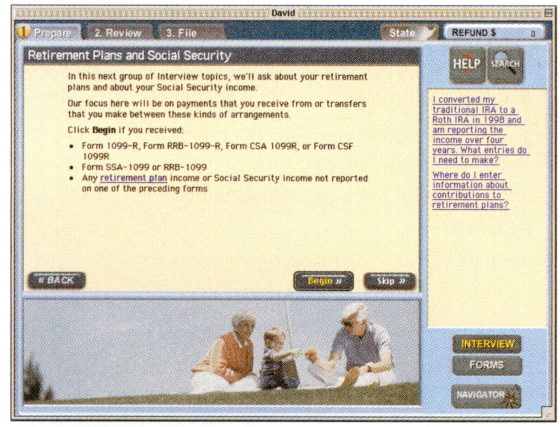
Movin' on Through

Getting around in MacInTax is a breeze. If you want to move from the interview to the forms themselves, you can click on a button that will call up a Forms Editor. There's no "Go Back" button, though — you have to know that an icon representing footsteps mean "go back." You can edit a form in TaxCut as well, and it's a bit more straightforward — when you're done editing a form, you click the Close box and you're back in the interview. Every time you need to collect documents in MacInTax, there's a "get organized" section, reminding you of what materials you need to gather, which is a nice touch.

TaxCut has made some changes in this year's version that make it much easier to get around. Last year, we noted that there was some confusion because the program often presented you with two buttons after a question, Begin and Next, and it was unclear which one you needed to click. The Next button is now called Skip, and this makes it much easier to understand — you can skip through topics that don't apply to you.

TaxCut has built in some thoughtful intelligence into the script. At one point, it told me, "You just told us your occupation is Editor. If you do freelance work, you might be able to deduct home office expenses."

The TaxCut Navigator is a bit confusing. It lists the topics in the interview, and marks off those that are Not Needed, To Do, In Progress, or Done. But some of the items in the To Do category were items that didn't apply to me — ones I had deliberately skipped. So attempting to go back and pick up where I had left off got me a bit lost. The MacInTax navigation bar is similar, but I found it simpler, because it doesn't have an explanatory legend — I didn't have to think about the meaning of unchecked items.



Kiplinger TaxCut uses the tax wisdom of H&R Block.

Special Features

After completing the interview in MacInTax, you can run a program called the Deduction Finder, which came up with some good ideas that I hadn't thought of — carryovers from the previous year. You can also run an Averages tool, which shows you how you compare with the national average, and MacInTax also has a Life Events planner, Tax planner, and an IRA planner. TaxCut has a Shoebox feature, which tells you exactly what kind of materials you need to gather, as well as a Quick Tax summary report and a "Where it Went" report. Both are easy to use and call up sensible, pertinent information about your tax situation.

The Feedback Factor

In some places, I could have used a bit of feedback from TaxCut. For example, when I clicked on a button to receive a program update from the Web, I got a "File not found" error. Actually, no update had been posted yet. But MacInTax told me as much when I tried to do an auto-update from that program. Similarly, if you forget to put the CD in the drive, with both programs, you won't get any video. MacInTax throws up a graphic that tells you that, but TaxCut doesn't tell you anything — it just shows you a blank square.

Also, both programs need to prompt you to save much more often. MacInTax reminds you about an hour into the program, and TaxCut waits until the end. If you crash during either program, or if there's a power failure, you'll lose a lot of work. So save early, and save often.

Go Forth, and Itemize!

Both programs will make tax-preparation easier, and both will provide you will a lot of sophisticated help that can translate into money. In fact, they're so similar that I was hard-pressed to declare an outright winner. TaxCut is less expensive, so you might want to go that route. If you're used to Intuit's products, though — last year's MacInTax, Quicken, and Quicken.com, then stick with MacInTax. MH

rating 🍎🍎🍎🍎

MacInTax Deluxe
$50, Intuit
800-446-8848
www.intuit.com

👍 **Comprehensive, has good supporting tools, well designed**

👎 **Clunky forms editor**

rating 🍎🍎🍎🍎

Kiplinger Tax Cut Deluxe
$40, Block Financial Corporation
800-656-5426
www.taxcut.com

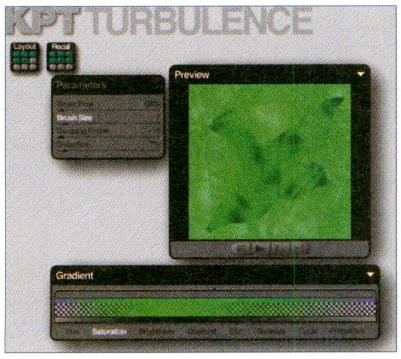
👍 **Inexpensive, thoughtful built-in intelligence, has good supporting tools**

👎 **Navigator has confusing legend, some missing feedback**

KPT 6

KPT 6, a brand new set of Photoshop filters from MetaCreations, packs enough creative potential to further inspire even the most artistic of souls.

KPT 6 (the newest in the KPT series) ships with eight plug-ins and two "bonus" filters, each capable of profoundly changing the look of your image, and, in some cases, animating your image. While KPT 6 is designed as a set of Photoshop filters, they can also be used with MetaCreations Painter and other art and image editing programs.



KPT 6 is like a software bundle — you get Goo, Equalizer, Projector, Gel, Materializer, LensFlare, Turbulence, and Reaction, plus the bonus filters SceneBuilder and SkyEffects for a very reasonable price of $150.

If you haven't yet tried KPT (short for Kai's Power Tools, in honor of its creator, the famed digital artist Kai Krause), the interface will strike you as being rather strange. It's not a classic Mac interface, but rather a universal interface wherein you are presented with a set of customizable panels that float over the workspace. A quick click around the screen will give you a good idea of how this intuitive program works.

Most of KPT 6's plug-ins are highly interactive and responsive. Just click the preview window and fiddle with the settings until you are satisfied with your image or animation. Most effects were quick to process and easy to make and undo. Goo let me create a fun animation that was easy and immediate.

Each plug-in operates somewhat differently, and some buttons were not as responsive on display type as I expected. For example, I tried to gel some type, but it did not have the effect I envisioned. Similarly, Materializer's effects on display type were minimal.

I also noticed a slight delay in performance with certain operations in KPT 6, especially in Goo. This consisted of a momentary freezing and then unlocking of the cursor as the program operated on the image.

The Final Decision While KPT 6 is quite intuitive, you'll want to acquaint yourself with the variety of controls that are explained in the KPT 6 manual to get the most out of the product.

— Jackie Dove

rating 4 apples

$150, MetaCreations
800-472-9025
www.metacreations.com

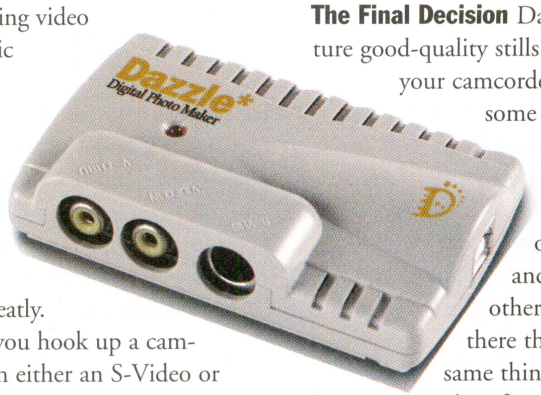
Elegant interface, easy to grasp, versatile

Didn't do much for type, slow at times

Dazzle Digital Photo Maker

Truth be told, we find Dazzle Multimedia's Dazzle Digital Photomaker only marginally dazzling. It's not that we don't appreciate the basic idea — capturing still images from a camcorder into a USB Mac. It's just that, well, we think this product is a tad one-dimensional.

This device captures video pretty well, either still frames or sequences. And it includes a rudimentary editor and photo-editing application. But that's pretty much it. The box and the manual mention features that work on the Windows version only, not on Mac, such as letting you select a picture and send it immediately as an attachment to an e-mail. The manual includes a small supplement about installing, not using, the Mac version. The supplement states that using the Mac software is functionally similar to its Windows counterpart, but didn't take into account that not all of the same functions are available. Those that are, such as capturing video and doing basic editing, work OK. The rest only work on the PC version. A Mac-specific manual would help greatly.



Dazzle lets you hook up a camcorder through either an S-Video or composite video cable, and digitizes at 320 x 240 pixel resolution. The quality's not bad, but the onscreen controls are a bit hard to figure out as they are iconic, lacking labels to tell you what does what. If you hold the cursor over one for a few seconds a label appears that tells you its basic function, but it's not much help.

I found a couple of strange things when testing this unit. First, I could get composite video to work but not S-Video. Secondly, when working in video-capture mode, the video display would not go away. The video screen showed through every other app I was running.

The Final Decision Dazzle lets you capture good-quality stills and video from your camcorder, and also has some useful editing tools. However, given the limited functionality of this product, and that there are other products out there that provide the same thing with more versatile software (such as XLR8's $99 InterView, which includes Strata's VideoShop 4.5), we just simply aren't all that dazzled.

— John Poultney

rating 2 apples

$99, Dazzle Multimedia
510-360-2300
www.dazzle.com
USB Required

Good-quality video and still-photo capture

Quirky operation, buggy, Windows-centric manual

Dramatica Pro

There are dozens of writing tools available that promise to help you overcome your current case of writer's block and have you spinning out reams of text within minutes. Generally, these programs spit out assembly line-quality tripe thinly veiled as story ideas — all perfectly suited for use in your run-of-the-mill mini-series or pulp novel. Not so Dramatica Pro. Dramatica Pro promises to put your mind to work allowing you to take your general story concept and turn it into a fully realized, well-woven tale, complete with believable characters and a well defined plot.

Dramatica Pro provides you with a number of ways to begin forming your stories but they all begin with the "Story Guide": a guided series of probing, often difficult questions that help you define your story. There are three levels — Level 1, which consists of about 60 questions; Level 2, which is slightly more detailed and asks about 75 questions; and Level 3, which runs you through a gauntlet of about 250 questions and goes through your story with a fine-tooth comb. Once you've done the obvious — like giving your characters names and genders — you're met with questions that truly get to the heart of your story: By the end of the story does your main character change or remain steadfast? Is your story's throughline related to an activity or an endeavor? Is your main character a be-er or a do-er? All of these questions force you to think in detail about your story and help you get a real grip on your characters and the plot they find themselves in.

The only downside to Dramatica Pro — and it is a small downside — is getting to used to the program's concept and vocabulary — it's based on the Dramatica model of story. Fortunately, you'll find plenty of documentation and an excellent Website to help you over any hurdle you face.

The Final Decision

Dramatica Pro is a hands-down slam dunk. If you're looking for a writing program that will flex your mental muscles and stretch you to be your creative best, you need look no further than Dramatica Pro.

— Jeff Battersby

rating 4½

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Initially difficult to master concept and language, Pricey

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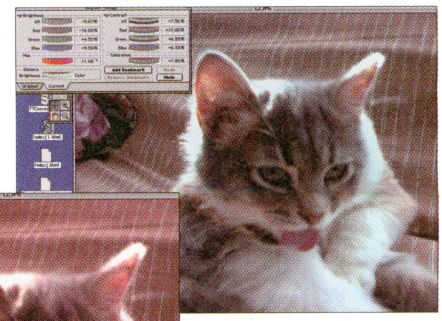
Great Photo!

One of the problems with digital cameras is that they're not intelligent enough. Cameras without sophisticated exposure controls can wash out your pictures with auto flash, pick up weird hues from ambient lighting, or simply underexpose your subject.

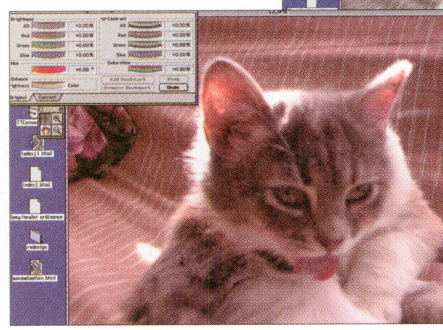
Software Architects has introduced Great Photo!, a simple image enhancement program that lets you correct image brightness, contrast, and color interactively on the screen with a much lower learning curve than a sophisticated image editor like Photoshop and at a fraction of the cost.

Great Photo! is very easy to use. And despite its simplicity, Great Photo! does a good job correcting some basic exposure problems on TIFFs, PICTs and JPEGs. For example, Great Photo's controls allowed me to take a poorly lit shot of my cat and raise the blue hue to the point that her white fur looked white instead of beige and her grey fur looked grey instead of brown. It also let me get rid of the red cast that suffused the entire picture. For other parts of the photo, Great Photo! was less able to compensate, such as a completely bleached out part of my cat's white fur.

Great Photo! also lets you see both the before and after versions of your image with the click of a tab. A small tool bar lets you magnify and crop images. An browser lets you easily preview images.



Before



After

One downside is that the controls work like dials that you click-and-drag with your mouse, which I found awkward at first. I would have preferred simple slider bars. But the dial does provide interactive numbers, so you don't forget your settings. The user guide, a PDF file, was very complete and answered all my questions.

The Final Decision Great Photo! lived up to its claims and worked well, but I found the price, $80, for what essentially is a small utility, a tad excessive.

— Jackie Dove

rating ●●●●

$80, Software Architects Inc.
800-863-9297
www.softarch.com

Versatile, easy to use

Awkward slider dial, too expensive

MyTV/fm

MyTV, by Eskape Labs, gets an "A" for effort, but methinks the device be just a bit better in theory than in practice.

MyTV lets you feed a television signal directly into your computer so you can watch TV while you surf, work, or Instant Message with your best friend about plot twists on "Beverly Hills, 90210." The higher-end model, MyTV/fm, lets you capture FM radio in addition to video.

And let's get to the goods right off the bat: MyTV is USB. It's honest-to-goodness plug-and-play, and it installs in a cool seven minutes flat (including software). But once you've got the thing up and running, a few tiny issues emerge. If you don't have cable, it can be hard to pick up a signal, and if you do have cable, it's hard to keep frames from dropping and sound from falling out of sync. It's a bit touchy, and we got a usable signal only about 25 percent of the time.

Still, MyTV is the only product that brings TV to your iMac, so it's worth a look in that regard. It works with the iBook, too, but you'll need a little extra hardware. MyTV requires a "sound-in" port and, well, the iBook doesn't have one. You'll have to plug headphones or external speakers into the sound-out port on the device itself to have portable television watching.

MyTV is a deeply cool concept, and potentially a deeply cool device. With a good cable signal, you can beam in any show you want and watch it in four window sizes, from postage stamp to fullscreen. We had no problems running a Web browser with MyTV playing, and the radio feature was equally appealing. You can also capture video, so you can watch movies from your VCR if you're so inclined (though we can't really imagine why you would be).

MyTV presents a fairly intuitive interface. But there's no way to channel-surf or scroll through channels for a signal, because you have to type in each station number you want by hand.

The Final Decision MyTV isn't perfect, but it breaks some fantastic ground. We think it has a brilliant future.

— Molly Wood

rating ●●●½

$210, Eskape Labs
925-249-6500
www.eskapelabs.com

Great concept, USB, easy to install, attractive, works with other programs running

Hard to get any channels if you don't have cable, can't channel-surf

LabelWriter EL60

If you find yourself printing a lot of little things — i.e., labels, you might want to look into having a dedicated label printer on your desk. Sure, you can print anything you want on a laser or an inkjet, but if you want to print just one at a time, you'll waste a lot of paper. The LabelWriter EL60, co-branded by CoStar and Dymo, is a nifty little printer for just this purpose.

The EL60 is a small, bulbous little unit that's just a bit larger than a grapefruit. It can accommodate labels that are up to 2 1/4 inches wide, so in addition to your standad fare, it can handle labels for items such as floppy disks, video tapes, and "Hello, My Name Is…" tags.

The EL60 has a lot of thoughtful design touches that make it easy to load different kinds of labels — just pull the lid open, pop out the spool, and press a lever to free up the paper path. An accessible form-feed button advances to the next label.

The printer comes with a small utility that prints 26 templates for a wide variety of labels. Some have decorative graphics, but many are a bit hackneyed — one of them is a blocky graphic of what looks like an old Mac SE. You can import contact information from your contact management program of choice — it can accept any tab-delineated text. You can change the font and move text blocks, but you can't Shift-Click to select multiple blocks, an exasperating limitation — if you've got a graphic and a return address that are hitting the top of the label, you can't move them down together.

In terms of print quality, you're not going to get the razor-sharp text that you'll get from a laser printer; text will have noticeable jags. Speed-wise, it performs well, taking about nine seconds to crank out a large label with a graphic. I tested the serial version, and the USB version, which goes for the same price, should be a bit faster.

The Final Decision The EL60 is a good little label printer, but if you might want to look around for a third-party application for printing labels, since the one it comes with is a bit limited. Also, if you need razor-sharp resolution, you might want to just make use of a laser printer.

— David Weiss

rating ●●●

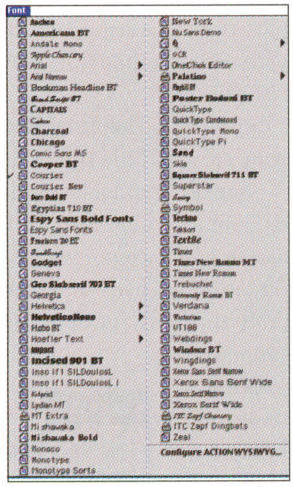
$200, Dymo-CoStar
203-661-9700
www.dymo.com

Easy to load media, prints wide variety of formats on a wide variety of labels, sensible design, fast

Low resolution, printer driver is limited, label graphics are a bit hackneyed

Action WYSIWYG 1.0.1

You are a font junkie. But when you install all those wonderful typefaces, your font menu is longer than a football field, even on a big 21 or 22-inch display. Salvation is at hand in the form of Power On Software's Action WYSIWYG font display utility.



As the name implies, WYSIWYG ("What You See Is What You Get") displays fonts in their true style. But it doesn't stop there. Action WYSIWYG also sorts font families in submenus, for quick access. So far, the program doesn't seem much different from its ancestor, Now WYSIWYG Menus or its direct competition, Adobe Type Reunion or Dubl-Click's MenuFonts.

But Power On has one more clever trick up its sleeve. Action WYSIWYG also splits the font menu into multiple columns, so you can spend less time scrolling, and more time picking the right font. As an added bonus, you can selectively disable the WYSIWYG display for symbol-type fonts, so you don't have to figure out what font is producing all that gibberish on the menu.

I just can't praise this program enough. It works just beautifully, with great compatibility, on my Blue & White Power Mac G3/400 (with 500Mhz upgrade), Mac OS 9, and loads of system extras.

The shortcomings are few: Action WYSIWYG doesn't work with some toolbar font menus, such as the ones in Microsoft Word 98 or AOL. However, it does support Adobe Illustrator and Adobe InDesign, something Adobe itself hasn't managed to accomplish yet for its own product, Type Reunion.

The Final Decision Font menus don't have to be a mile long. Action WYSIWYG helps you quickly access your fonts and preview them before you use them. For $30, it's a bargain. It's even a bigger bargain if you opt for the entire Action Utilities collection for $80. In addition to Action WYSIWYG, you'll also get Action Files, Action GoMac and Action Menus in the collection.

— Gene Steinberg

rating 4½

$30, Power On Software
612-317-0344
www.poweronsoftware.com

Fast, fast performance; displays fonts in true style; multi-pane window and submenus shorten font menus

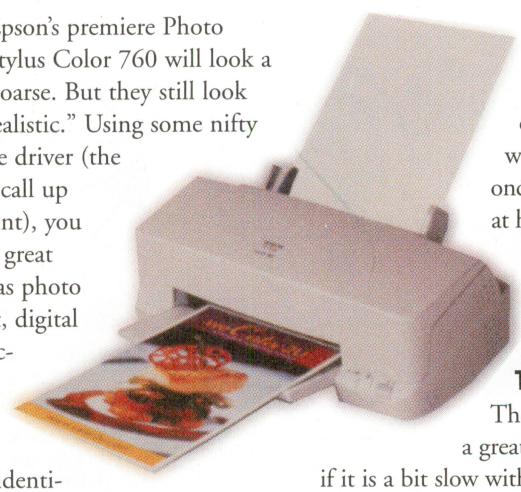
Microsoft Word, AOL toolbar font menus not supported

Stylus Color 760

Epson makes many a good printer. Very many. Are they making too many? Epson has the Stylus *Photo* series, the six-color printers that are optimal for photographs, and they also make the Stylus *Color* series, the four-color series that produces almost-but-not-quite-as-stellar photographic color as the Photo series, but at much higher speeds. But now Epson makes the Stylus Color 760 for $199, and the Stylus Color 860 for $249. These are both identical in almost every respect, but the 860 is supposed to print faster.

The Stylus Color 760, like its more expensive twin, the 860, is a top-loading inkjet. And because they're top-loaders, you can feed in banner paper for that super-large seaside panoramic photo. The output tray can telescope outward to catch larger paper, and when you're not using the printer, you can fold up the output tray for some extra space.

Its images are superb. Gradients are smooth, smooth, smooth, but if you compare its photos to those of the Stylus Photo 750, Epson's premiere Photo printer, the Stylus Color 760 will look a touch more coarse. But they still look very "photorealistic." Using some nifty settings in the driver (the software you call up when you print), you can get some great effects, such as photo enhancement, digital camera correction, and sepiatone. Output from the 760 was identical to that of the 860 throughout all tests.



The 760 is fast, when printing photos. Epson's Photo 750 can produce a full-page, 300 dots-per-inch image in about six minutes with its highest quality settings on its best paper. With the Stylus Color 760, the same print took only two and a half minutes, and the more-expensive 860 came in about nine seconds faster. Surprisingly, the 760 came out ahead in a few tests with low-resolution images. The 760 was a bit pokey printing Microsoft Word, at the fastest settings. It took 52 seconds for one page, compared with the 860's 24 seconds. But oddly enough, at higher settings, using better paper, the 760 beat the 860 by a second.

The Final Decision The Stylus Color 760 is a great value for $199, even if it is a bit slow with text on the fastest settings. It's output is extraordinary, and it showed comparable speeds, and sometimes better, than the pricier 860.

— David Weiss

rating 4

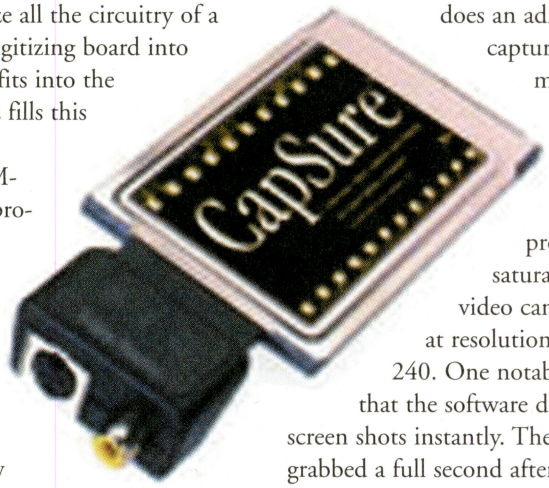
$229, ($199 after rebate); Epson America
800-463-7766
www.epson.com

Beautiful output, fast at most tasks, easy to set up

Slow on straight text on the fastest settings

CapSure with Reel-Eyes LE

PowerBook users yearning for a video capture solution have had few options. It's been difficult for manufacturs to squeeze all the circuitry of a full-size video digitizing board into a PC Card that fits into the PowerBook. Irez fills this void with the CapSure, a PCMCIA Card that provides full screen, real-time video display and capture. Composite (RCA jack) and S-Video connectors allow road warriors to hook video cameras, VCRs, and video game systems to their PowerBooks. Imagine recording your trip to the top of Mt. Fuji, going back to your hotel room, digitizing a few snippets of video and sending the files home to Mom and Dad. The CapSure allows you to collect video images anywhere, anytime.



The CapSure card ships with a limited version of Irez's Reel-Eyes video editing software. Reel-Eyes LE does an admirable job of capturing full motion video and screen shots. Standard controls are provided for hue, saturation, etc., and video can be captured at resolutions up to 320 x 240. One notable drawback is that the software does not take screen shots instantly. The image is often grabbed a full second after the screen shot button is pressed, making it difficult to capture time-sensitive images. The full version of Reel-Eyes, for $69, addresses this problem.

The CapSure's only serious flaw is its poor industrial design. A fat plastic box housing the S-Video and composite connectors is rigidly fastened to the card. It's a significant problem for people attempting to use the CapSure and PowerBook on an uneven surface, such as a lap. Too much pressure upwards or downwards will surely snap the connector box clear off the card. Irez should have opted to house the connectors in a removable dongle.

The Final Decision The CapSure card is a real steal. Although you must be cautious with the card's connector box, you're going to like your new portable video editing system.

— Chris McVeigh

rating 4 apples

$129, Irez (PAR Technologies)
800-886-3692
www.irez.com
PowerBook with PCMCIA slot required

Inexpensive, good quality video digitizing and screen shot capture

Rigid connector housing may break easily

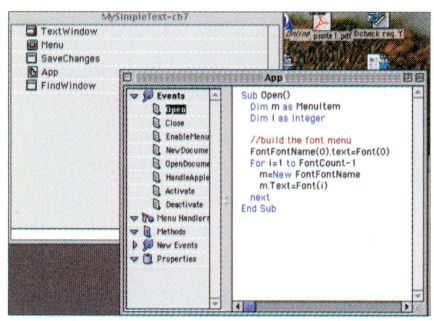
REALBasic 2.0

In December 1998, we gave Real Software's REALbasic our highest rating, and we meant it because the product lets you into the realm of Mac programming gently, but in such a way as to make you learn concepts thoroughly as you go. We're pleased to announce that, yes, like a fine wine, REALbasic has improved with age.

Version 2.0 builds on the original concept of a graphical method of programming usually referred to as "object-oriented." The objects are the program's components — windows, buttons, menus and so forth — and you construct a program primarily by linking them together and specifying which actions cause which reactions. Thus you are spared much of the confusion that arises from coding, or writing — letter by letter — cryptic instructions that a computer can understand.

Much, but not all. You'll still be presented with a fair amount of code, such as "if radiobutton1.value then theEffect=GetQTcrossfadeEffect." If that doesn't make much sense to you, join the club. But soon enough, you'll learn and understand.

REALbasic is no picnic, but if you're willing to work at it, you'll be amazed at what you can accomplish. In fact, to show what you can do, the CD-ROM includes a whole bunch of cool programs made from REALbasic.



The new version adds copious new interface components, so you can vastly improve on the appearance and functionality of your apps. It also adds new commands for accessing QuickTime functions, so you can create applications for editing, or otherwise using video and sound. As with other functions in REALbasic, this is not trivial.

The Final Decision Version 1.0 included a tutorial for making a simple word processor, which was an excellent way of introducing you to the ways of REALbasic. Unfortunately, version 2.0 uses the same tutorial. It still works, but it would be nice to have the new concepts illustrated. Otherwise you must delve into thick, intimidating manuals called "Developer's Guide" and "Language Reference," neither of which are as easy as a friendly little tutorial.

— John Poultney

rating 4½ apples

$100, Standard Edition; $300, Professional Edition
REAL Software
512-263-1233
www.realsoftware.com

Excellent, simple way of learning programming and developing working apps

Tutorial doesn't cover many of the new versions' functions

Tell It Like It Is

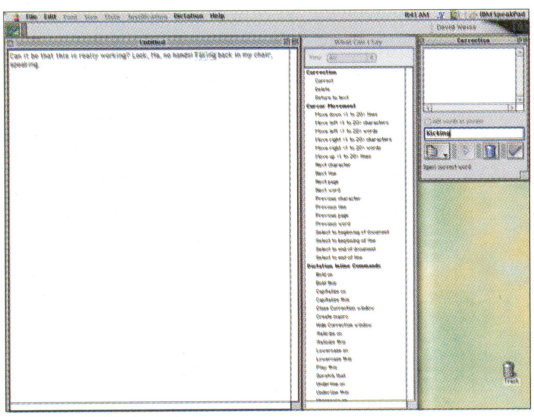
ViaVoice Brings Speech Recognition to the Mac

By David Weiss

Imagine this: You're kicking back in your chair, speaking words out into the air, and out they pop onto your computer screen. Such is the promise of speech recognition software, and such is the promise of IBM's ViaVoice Millennium Edition for Macintosh.

ViaVoice comes with a headset that's not only sturdy — with a steel, adjustable boom mic and large, foam earpiece — it's also stylish, in the iMac sense of the word, since it has clip-on covers in all iMac colors (except for graphite).

The software's main interface is the SpeakPad, which is where your spoken words will appear, and at the top of each document is a status bar which allows you to turn the microphone off and on and shows you your audio level.



The Teaching Curve

ViaVoice creates a sophisticated "voice model," which is an evolving database of words and the way you say them. And it allows you to set up multiple users, so in a family or other group setting, it knows who's who.

Before dictating for the first time, you have to read a segment of text into the program for about 15 – 20 minutes. I first tried this in a very noisy setting, amid the hubbub of a usual workday here at *MacHome* headquarters, and my first attempt at dictation was less than optimal — I couldn't even get it to recognize the practice sentences in the ViaVoice manual. Then I did it again on a much quieter day, and I read two stories in a row, so the program had more data to analyze. After that, recognition dramatically improved, and I was able to rattle off the practice sentences with no problem at all. Still, using ViaVoice is an exercise in patience. Even when it works well, it doesn't know words that aren't in its dictionary, and you have to take time to teach it. So whereas most programs have a learning curve, ViaVoice has a "teaching" curve. It initially translated a review on Agfa's SnapScan Touch as "Snaps can't touch," but how can you blame it? After I taught it the words, it handled them fairly well as they came up. The correction recorder, however, is a bit finicky — you have to record a word three or four times, sometimes, in order for it to get it. And to do that you have to speak louder than you do when you're dictating.

You can also add new words to the ViaVoice dictionary by having the program analyze your documents. ViaVoice will call up words it doesn't know and ask you to say them.

By and by I was able to teach it, and after a week and a half of working with ViaVoice, I was able to dictate a simple letter with about 90% accuracy, and speaking almost — but not quite — as fast and as naturally as I normally do. Sometimes it makes little mistakes such as failing to capitalize a letter after a period and a space. And by default it capitalizes phrases that we don't normally capitalize — such as "white point" (a setting for scanners) — probably thinking I meant a place.

Fancy Moves

ViaVoice also knows a whole host of spoken commands, such as "New Paragraph," and "Begin Spell," (which is great for Web addresses). Using your voice, you can also transfer text directly into America Online, Netscape, AppleWorks, and Microsoft's Outlook Express and Word. For other programs, you need to use the tried and true Copy/Paste method.

The Final Decision

ViaVoice is a nifty way to get into dictation. It's very affordable, it comes with a good headset, and it learns as you use it. If you can get past the "teaching" curve, ViaVoice opens up a whole new way of composing your thoughts. MH

rating 🍎🍎🍎🍎

ViaVoice
$79, IBM
800-426-4968
www.ibm.com

Comes with good headset, inexpensive, provides powerful speech recognition, learns as you go, allows you to teach it your way of talking, easy-to-use, intuitive software

Sometimes Correction Window fails to hear your recording, doesn't work well in noisy settings, makes a few capitalization errors, Audio Setup could be streamlined

By Jackie Dove

Plug-In Power

Conquering the Creativity Crisis

Web designers, indeed all artists, are familiar with creativity block. You know it has come over you when — despite all the compliments you get on your Website — you're sick and tired of the way it looks, and you want to ditch it for something entirely new. The problem is, you can't quite figure out what.

One of the best ways to redesign a Website is to change the graphical interface and create a whole new look. This in no way implies that information design and compelling content are not critical, rather that an exciting visual design will make a good site even better.

Enter image filters. Filters, an assortment of which ship with Photoshop, apply pixel-based formulas that change the nature of your images to give them special effects. Creating a new graphical scheme can be accomplished in Photoshop, but Photoshop has its limitations after awhile. After applying the same effects over and over again, they do tend to get, well, old.

What to do? Think plug-in. Photoshop plug-in filters can inject fresh inspiration into your Web design. Plug-ins — both commercial and shareware — hit the market on a regular basis. Using plug-in image filters can give your Website a visual change of pace that reflects your current style and mood. This is the time to experiment. So are you ready to go wild and crazy?

What's a Plug-In

A plug-in is a small software program that works within a larger program — it literally plugs into it. Some plug-ins also are available as standalone or independent programs, but many can only work through a larger host program such as Photoshop, Illustrator, Freehand, Painter, or some other graphics program.

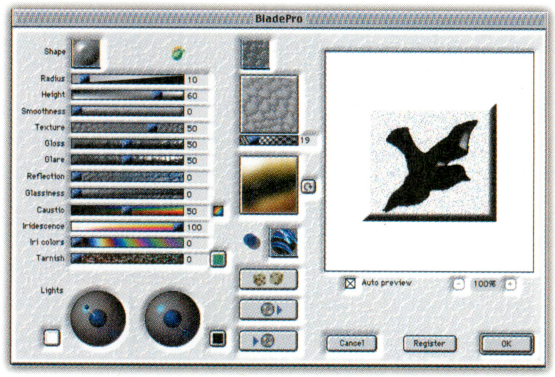
Increasingly, integrated Web-design programs, as well as graphics programs, will accept Photoshop-standard plug-ins, and that means you don't have to have Photoshop to use them. While there are way too many Photoshop plug-in special-effects filters to list here, we'll show you how you can experiment with six different plug-ins to make your new Web design truly outstanding.

In Photoshop, you install plug-ins into a special plug-ins folder inside the applications folder, after which the plug-in will show up in the Filters menu when the program is launched. The general procedure is to open your image in the main application — such as Photoshop 5.5, which we will use in this workshop — and then launch the plug-in to generate special effects. In this workshop, we will show you the following plug-in packages for Photoshop 5.5:

- Eye Candy 3.0 by Alien Skin
- Xenofex 1.0 by Alien Skin
- BladePro by Flaming Pear
- KPT 6 by MetaCreations
- Xhatch 1.5 by Inklination
- Photo/Graphic Edges 4.0 by Auto/FX

How to Install

Most software packages ship with installation instructions, so be sure to follow the directions of your specific package. For the plug-ins featured in this article, you'll need to install each program directly into the plug-ins folder of your graphics program (if it comes with an installer), or simply drag the plug-in icon into the plug-ins folder inside the Photoshop applications folder.



Working with Images

You don't have to be an artist, photographer, or illustrator to work with images.

There are literally millions of images available on the Web or from royalty-free CD-ROMs. In this example, we used some fun clip art from Web Parts by Font Haus (www.dsgnhaus.com). We also used scanned bitmapped graphics, scanned photographs, and Photoshop-generated type.

You can derive clip art from various places, but the way you use filters can give disparate art taken from many sources a unified look and feel. After you have experimented and decided which effects you want to use, you can apply them equally to all of your images for a complete effect, or you can use different effects for different types of images.

Then too, you can layer filter effects on top of each other from the same or different software packages to create a totally unique and compelling graphical scheme. Be aware that not all filters work in the same way. Some will only work if you are in RGB mode (a specific image mode in Photoshop), for example. You can also save time when working with filters by applying them to a small part of your graphic first, or applying them to a low-resolution version of your image, but that is up to you.

If you're creating art for a Website, finished images should be no more than 72 dots per inch, as that is the highest resolution you can view on the screen. However, there is no single set of criteria to determine the resolution of your original image. One widely accepted practice is to scan at a high resolution (say 300 dpi) and then save the original in case you need to start over again. Then, make a copy of your high-resolution image and downsample (lower the number of dots per inch) by half to, say, 150 dpi. That technique lets you to work in slightly double the resolution you'll need for Web graphics, giving you the flexibility of working for print and online environments, plus the added convenience of a smaller file. You can downsample a version of your image to Web resolution of 72 dpi later on when you're done. As you work, it helps to magnify your image by 200% to 300% of its original size.

If you use the same image with three different filters (or use three different effects with one filter), you can create a rollover such that your image changes as the mouse is rolled over it and clicked. Very nice! (The rollover is done in a separate operation, however)

KPT 6

KPT 6 is one of the newest filter packages from MetaCreations. It features 10 new special-effects plug-ins and two extra filters. The interface features many palettes, icons, and interactive sliders that replace common pull-down menus.

Especially compatible with Photoshop and Painter 6, KPT 6 features filters such as Equalizer, Goo, LensFlare, Materializer, Projector, Reaction, Turbulence, SceneBuilder and SkyEffects. (The latter two plug-ins have a slightly different interface than the rest.)

KPT filters also come with a large preset library that stores preset images you can use as environment maps, lights, and gradients.

Eye Candy 3.0

Eye Candy, from Alien Skin Software, is a set of 21 filters that include interactively adjustable effects such as Fire, Smoke, and Perspective Shadow, as well as frequently used effects such as Cutout, Drop Shadow, Inner Bevel, and Water Drops. In addition to Photoshop, Eye Candy filters can also be used with Adobe Image Ready 1.0 or later, Corel Photo-Paint 8 or later, Deneba Canvas 6 or later, and others.

Each Eye Candy effect can be previewed interactively with presets and slider bars and can be either applied or canceled. The preview mode lets you zoom in and out from 6% to 1600% of your original image. In addition, each Eye Candy filter comes with at least 10 presets, giving you more than 200 special effects to start with. The program also lets you save your own settings for later use, making it easy to duplicate effects.

Xenofex 1.0

This set of 16 plug-in filters by Alien Skin gives you complex special effects such as Baked Earth, Little Fluffy Clouds, Shower Door, Lightning, and more. This filter set includes distortion filters such as Television and Flag, as well as effects such as Puzzle and Rounded Rectangle. Xenofex gives you that way-cool Alien Skin interface, with its resizeable and zoomable previews, slider controls, and some 160 presets.

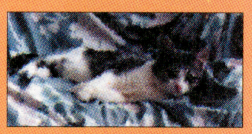
KPT 6

I used two different filters to alter the image of an old-fashioned radio clip-art illustration. The first image comes directly from Art Parts for the Web CD-ROM. Then, using KPT 6's Materializer filter, I re-colored and re-lit the radio to give it a metallic look. After that, I applied Alien Skin's Xenofex Electrify filter to give it that radiant look.

Eye Candy 3.0

In this example, I used a scanned logo and applied some subtle flairto it using Eye Candy. The first image is a direct scan from a paper document into Photoshop, and though it's cute, it does look rather plain. I danced up the walrus a bit by applying Eye Candy's Drop shadow in green, though I could have used any color and with a virtually infinite number of variations. I also tried a different watercolor effect using a yellow glow within Eye Candy.

Xenofex 1.0



I took a scanned photo of Lila and applied some Xenofex effects. First I tried running her photo through the Television filter, which gave a somewhat old-fashioned and colorful effect. But then I wanted to see what the Shower Door effect would look like, and I ran the photo through that filter separately.

BladePro

BladePro presents many creative and dynamic opportunities for all kinds of images, as the program's specialty is combining textures with bevels and mirror-like reflections. You can create tarnish, iridescence, glassiness, and 3D looks.

Rendering type in BladePro is also fun. I started off with Sonoma Typeface and then added other effects within in the program's intuitive interface. I also took Jester typeface and made a name plate for my kittens.

Photo/Graphic Edges 4.0

Here are three interpretations of Lisa, Lila's twin sister. The first is a plain scan. The second image uses Auto/FX's Photo/Graphic Edges to create a unique frame. In the third image, I applied Eye Candy's Jiggle filter on top of the framed image to create a distorted image of my kitten.

Photo/Graphic Edges 4.0

Using filters with photographs presents an entirely different set of alternatives and challenges. While filters are often used on photos to fix them in some way — to color correct or sharpen an image, for example — Photo/Graphic Edges 4.0 by Auto F/X lets you apply hand-crafted, evocative frames to your photos. If you frame photos for display in your living room, why not frame them for your Website?

Photo/Graphic Edges can be used as either a Photoshop plug-in or an independent application. As a plug-in, the program can be used with the latest versions of MetaCreations Painter, Corel Photo-Paint, and other programs that support the Photoshop plug-in standard.

In addition to Photo/Graphic Edges' decorative frame filters, you can also apply other filters on top of the frames for a variety of effects. As of press time, there were four CD-ROM volumes of edge effects to choose from: Traditional, Geometric, Artistic, and Darkroom, plus a supplemental CD with another 2,500 frames called — appropriately — Over the Edge. The first three CDs shipped with 300 to 425 edges, and 40 special effects. However, by the time you read this, Auto F/X will have upgraded this product to Photo/Graphic Edges 10,000 +, which includes 4 CDs (including all the frames), for $199. Needless to say, your photos need never again go without a unique frame.

Xhatch 1.5

One filter that gives you really interesting effects is Xhatch 1.5 from Inklination. This plug-in specializes in creating traditional pen-and-ink effects that can give your photos and pixel-based illustrations a traditional pen-and-ink look. The Xhatch filter features 30 built-in effects and five apply modes, including Scratchboard, Texturize, Mask, and Reveal, giving you many ways to create custom effects with a simple, interactive user interface.

Finishing Up

When you are satisfied with your new images, then it's time to get them in Web shape. You may have to resize your images to fit your overall Web page layout. You will also have to downsample your high-resolution images to 72 dpi for onscreen viewing. You will also need to convert your images into either GIFs or JPEGs.

You can optimize your images in Photoshop 5.5, which has a handy Save for Web feature, wherein you can view them in the browser. Then load your images into an HTML editor and check how they look in the browser. You can also use Adobe ImageReady's (which comes with Photoshop 5.5) JavaScript Rollover feature to create your buttons.

Knock Yourself Out

These are just a small number of the vast variety of tools and techniques you can use to make your Website look compelling. Investigate the plug-ins available for your graphic art program and spend some time playing with effects until you find exactly the right ones for your site. MH

Alien Skin Software
Eye Candy: $129
Xenofex: $129
888-921-7546
www.alienskin.com

MetaCreations
KPT 6: $150
800-472-9025
www.metacreations.com

Inklination
Xhatch 1.5: $25
604-608-2649
www.inklination.com

Flaming Pear Software
BladePro: $49
800-656-5426
www.flamingpear.com

Auto F/X
Photo/Graphic Edges 10,000+
$199
205-980-0056
www.autofx.com

net life [dot.com]

By John Poultney

Welcome to MacHome's dot.com! Each month we present to you a smattering of e-commerce sites worthy of a further look. Let's begin!

Breathe Easier

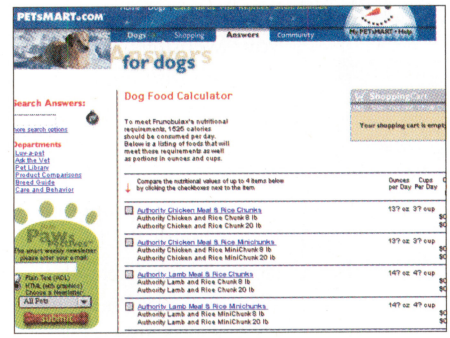
What's making you sneeze? Many of us these days suffer from various allergies, what with all the pollen, cat hair, and dust mites floating around the atmosphere. For some, allergies are a mere annoyance, while others find their lifestyles severely hampered by sneezes, coughs, and itchy eyes.

Gazoontite.com specializes in products, advice, and services for the allergic among us. You'll find everything from industrial-strength room air purifiers to a handy pollen forecast chart (you pick an area of the U.S. and read a pollen index). There are also books and educational materials, specialized vacuuming equipment, hypoallergenic bedding supplies, and more. If you're feeling sniffly or know someone who is, this site is worth a look.

www.gazoontite.com

PetSmart

Maybe what's making you sniffly is your pet. But don't evict that friendly dog or cat just yet. PetSmart.com lists all kinds of products that help to maintain 'most any



type of pet, be they dogs, cats, reptiles, even binturongs. We particularly enjoy the innovative "Pet Food Calculator," wherein you enter your beast's vital stats and then get a summary of food brands and amounts needed to meet that animal's nutritional requirements. You'll also find departments for important pet information, such as "what is corn gluten and why is it in my cat's food?," and discussion forums where you can discuss your pets with others.

www.petsmart.com

Add a Room!

House too small? Need to add a room, maybe, to install your long-dreamed-of robotics lab? A nice skylight perhaps? ImproveNet is a good place to start.

Aside from information about pro-

ceeding apace with such projects, this site also lets you search for contractors in your area that specialize in what you need. And take it from us, do-it-yourself plumbing isn't nearly as glamorous as it sounds.

www.improvenet.com

Quite Contrary

Maybe it's those dandelions and elderberries in the garden that are making you sneeze. A quick visit to Garden.com can fix that up, as this site deals in everything even remotely garden-related. Whether you seek a weed-removal tool or a tome on which orchids thrive in your limnetic zone, this site is a bloom-

ing planter box filled with fresh-scented plant-like objects. Check out the "Garden Planner," in which you visually select plants for your garden. Gee, you sure smell nice and flowery!

www.garden.com

Get a Job

How to pay for all this stuff? If you have overlooked this critical link in the system, CareerMosaic is there for you. A longtime player in the online employment realm, CareerMosaic lets you search for jobs by keyword and location; there's a handy "QuickSearch" in which you just fill in your desired Zip code of employment, a keyword, and off you go. The system finds appropriate jobs within a specified radius (default 25 miles) of that Zip code.

www.careermosaic.com MH

By Jackie Dove

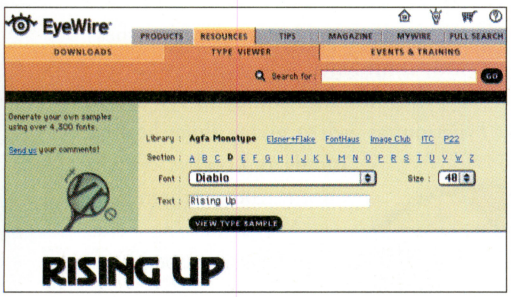
Fontasia!

Website Serves Stylish Fonts

When it comes to fonts — families of typefaces — Bookmarks admits to being a total fanatic. Indeed, some projects get held up for months because we are not sufficiently inspired by the resident fonts in our collection.

Brand new fonts produced by large and small type foundries, as well as individuals with a similar affliction to ours, tend to foster this addiction. And it doesn't help that many fonts are shareware, freeware, or reasonably priced. This chaos is destined to continue.

The Website that got us hooked beyond all reason was EyeWire. Its type section lets you preview and download some 4,300 typefaces from the libraries of type's finest houses — the *couturiers* of type, if you will — such as Agfa Monotype, Adobe, FontHaus, ITC, Elsner + Flake, Image Club, and our personal favorite, P22. A selection of new faces is listed, complete with samples and a description.



Using EyeWire's type viewer, you can actually see your headlines in the face of your choice — no longer do you have to settle for a generic font sample. (Think of it as the difference between seeing a sweater on the rack and actually trying it on.) On EyeWire's type viewer page, you simply type in your text and see how it looks in your chosen font. Get ready to burn some serious time.

The type section of EyeWire is part of a larger graphic art and design Website, but like the rest of the site, it is cleanly designed and easy to navigate. A navigation bar, complete with a search utility, appears on every page. A single click takes you to the type viewer. When you get to the type viewer page, there is space to type in your headline. A pull-down menu gives you access to all of the typefaces available on the EyeWire Website.

Our only caveat with the EyeWire type viewer is that sometimes it runs rather slowly. That's because it has to configure individually each headline in the specified typeface, and that takes some computing power.

EyeWire's fonts will cost you money. But, you know how it feels when you find exactly the right one. Life is bliss.

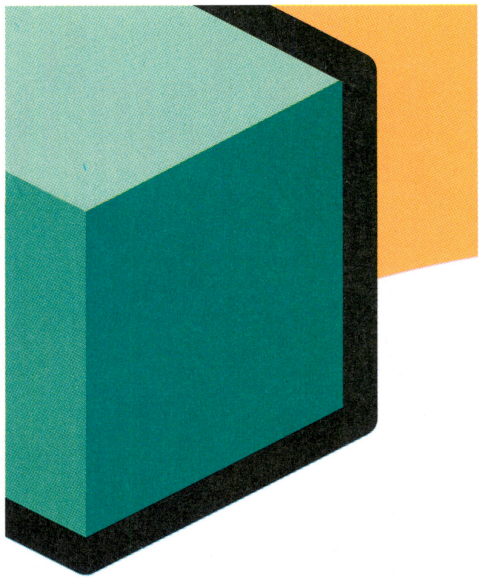
Eyewire, www.eyewire.com/fonts

Fonts Convert

Watch out for fonts on the Web that are made specifically for that other operating system, and are not Macintosh fonts. This is a terrible shame, of course, but there is actually an easy way out of that fix.

If you happen to download a font with a .ttf suffix (meaning a Windows font), don't despair: just convert it into a genuine Mac font using TTConverter. TTConverter is available at the bottom of the Free Stuff 101 Fonts page, and it does the job quickly and easily. Very nice!

TTConverter, www.freestuff101.com/Fonts



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The visual, object-oriented BASIC development environment for Macintosh®

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By Molly Wood

Jerry's Kids

Jerry Rice Joins Neighborhood Kids in Humongous' *Backyard Football*

Jerry Rice feels like a kid again. The San Francisco 49ers' wide receiver is catching passes from John Elway and Brett Favre, not Steve Young or Jeff Garcia.

He's running down a sandy lot, criss-crossing a grassy yard, and catching a football as big as a cannonball in his 8-year-old arms — he's playing pickup games after school with five kids to a side in the old neighborhood.

What's got Rice's inner child fooling around in backyards again? It's *Backyard Football*, by Humongous Entertainment (see review, January 1999, four apples).

Backyard Football is the latest offering in Humongous' Junior Sports line, which includes *Backyard Baseball* and *Backyard Soccer*. It's just out for the Mac, and it's bound to be a hit with the junior gridder set.

In the game, "neighborhood" kids play football with NFL players — redrawn as children and appropriately decked out in (much smaller) official team uniforms.

For Rice, who spoke to *MacHome* during filming of a television commercial to promote the new game, it's a wonder to behold.

"It's almost like being a little kid all over again," he says. "I'm all excited about it."

Humongous (*www.humongous.com*) is all excited about it, too, staging its biggest ad push ever with a series of 30-second commercials that aired in late December and early January.

In the commercials, Jerry appears as himself, then morphs into the cartoon that represents him in the game.

"I hope he looks like me," Rice jokes before the shoot.

Could ... Go ... All ... the ... Way

Hoping to capitalize on the success of such games as *Madden NFL 2000* and the ever-burgeoning market for kids' games, Humongous is bolstering a line of cartoon sports games with a tried-and-true play: football.

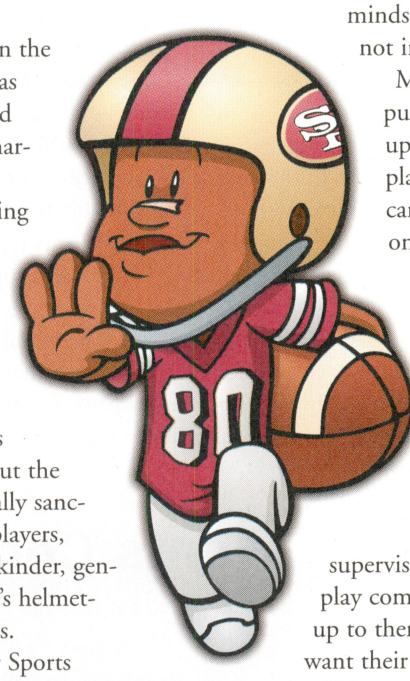
With NFL backing, including the use of the NFL logo on its Website and throughout the game, as well as officially sanctioned uniforms and players, *Backyard Football* is a kinder, gentler version of autumn's helmet-crunching Sunday bliss.

Humongous' Junior Sports Network is unique in the realm of children's games, as one of the few — if not the only — label offering sports games for tykes.

Children's games have a tendency to be fantasy/adventure cartoons that revolve around some irritatingly cheerful guide character. After you wade through the scads of art, drawing, math, science, raeding and learning programs, kids may be left yearning for some good old fashioned ... playing!

Don't get us wrong: educational titles are usually educational, but they're rarely all that much fun.

And as we all know, sports teaches kids confidence, self-esteem, strategy, critical thinking, and hand-eye coordination, as well as giving them healthy minds and bodies. So why not introduce them early?



Maybe playing a computer game doesn't match up to the experience of playing real sports, but it can be a great diversion on a rainy day.

And for a child who lacks the confidence or skill to jump right into little league baseball, football, or soccer, it can be a valuable introduction.

"Parents should supervise their kids when they play computer games, and it's up to them to decide what they want their kids to play," Rice says. "This is not harmful. It's very good, and it's positive, and anytime anything is positive, I think kids should get involved."

The players themselves are cute cartoon kids and the eight NFL players that appear as child caricatures are rendered appropriately childlike (tough-guy quarterback Brett Favre, when hit with a

particularly bruising tackle, whines, "Ow, that hurt.") And while little can take the violence out of football — and golly, why would you want to? — this children's version is appealing for its kid-like goofiness as much as its tackles and kicks.

"I'm not really into a lot of [computer games]," Rice says. "But this is one I feel good about. I think it's going to be good for kids."

Which is not to say there's anything childlike about the gameplay.

Put Me In, Coach

Kids at the helm of *Backyard Football* get to be player-coaches with Mike Holmgren-like control over their teams. The rules are a combination of actual NFL rules and college rules. There are no penalties, but aside from that, the rules of scoring and downs are the same as in real-life football.

Kids can build a team of up to seven players — gameplay is five-on-five — choosing from eight real NFL players, including Rice, Young, Favre, Elway, Barry Sanders, Drew Bledsoe, and Randall Cunningham.

The rest of the team is made up of "neighborhood" kids with full-fledged identities of their own. Play with Pablo Sanchez, Kiesha Phillips, or Maria Luna (gender equality being one of the bonuses of backyard football).

And lest your children feel left out, the game has a "Create-A-Player" function that lets the pups add a new kid to the neighborhood — and hey, he looks like me! Well, maybe not exactly, but you can choose a name, face, and skill level for your new teammate. And what the heck — be egocentric.

Once the team is assembled, kids can choose which of the 31 NFL teams to be, then outfit the players in (somewhat smaller-than-real-life) official uniforms.

Players pick from one of five playing surfaces, including stadiums, sandlots, or muddy fields, and then choose weather conditions — rain, snow, or sleet. Or, well, sunshine. And they're off!

There are championship games and tournaments, including the "Super Colossal Cereal Bowl," the "Backyard Conference Championship," and the "Parks Division Champions Trophy." Kids can play a 14-game season and vie for titles and even Hall of Fame trophies throughout. And as coaches and managers, they can pick from nearly 100 premade plays or design up to 48 new ones.

Rice, who claims his 8-year-old son is a far more proficient computer gamer than himself, says he likes the fact that the kids in the game are, in fact, like children. They might be a little more awkward, they might fall down, they might even — horrors! — drop a pass. But Jerry takes the prospect in stride.

"I kind of like it that they're kids," he says. "I'm in (*Madden NFL 2000*) and I'm unstoppable in there. I catch everything. This is a little more real."

Team Player

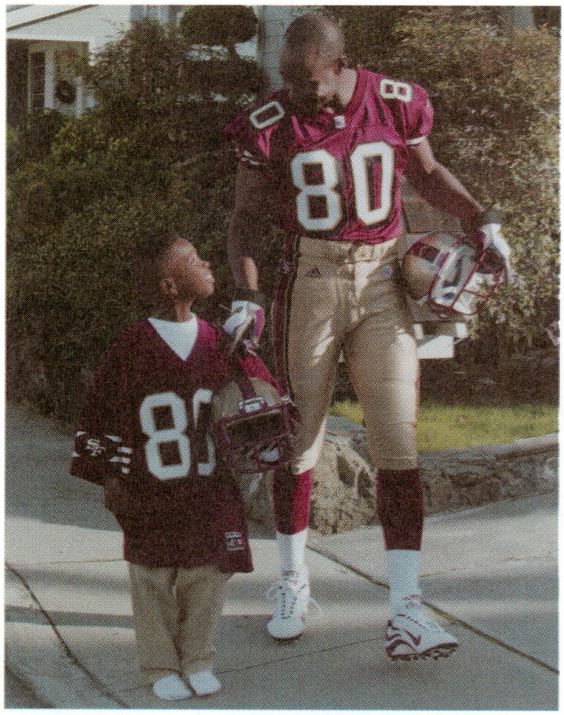
Backyard Football isn't a solo effort for kids, either. Humongous has created the Junior Sports Network as an online community (www.jrsn.com), billing itself as a "sports destination for kids." There are friendly cartoon greetings and characters, links to the Network's network of games, links to the official NFL site, fan sites and the NFL "quarterback club."

The Website includes a page where you can register a team name and then post to an online bulletin board, chatting with other kids about *Backyard Football* and sports in general.

So far, Mac users can't play *Backyard Football* online, a fact that dampens our enthusiasm for the game slightly, but we here at *MacHome* are eternally hopeful that Humongous will soon see the light (you know, guys, over 90 percent of iMac users are on the Internet). Meantime, Mac kids can content themselves with using the chat feature to pressure Humongous into an online-play-compatible Macintosh version of the game.

The Website includes quizzes about sports topics, a section called "Chalk Talk," about the history of the game, and interactive trading cards that show photos of the backyard kids, along with some playing stats and an action shot.

In fact, the welcoming introduction to the site is Rice himself, who says the game and the Website appeal to both his own 8-year-old son and more advanced users. Humongous is betting its complex site will keep kids coming back — not just for the football, but maybe for the baseball and soccer games, as well.



Humongous' *Backyard Football* has 49ers' wide receiver Jerry Rice in touch with his inner child (at left).

The whole thing is geared for kids between 5 and 10 years of age, but the game is enough fun that adults are bound to horn in on the playing time occasionally. And the Website is appealing enough that older kids are likely to join the chat rooms, if only for the pint-sized sports trivia.

Rice says the game is creating a whole new bond between him and his son — hero-worship role-reversal.

"My son is always winning, so he gets a little bored playing me," Rice laments with a laugh. "He doesn't feel like I'm a threat or anything."

Luckily, Jerry, there's always real life. MH

Super Duper Arcade 1 & 2

$20 each, sold separately
Humongous Entertainment
800-499-8386
www.humongous.com
Ages 3 to 10

Humongous Entertainment's *Super Duper Arcade 1 & 2* bring animated computer screen legends Freddi Fish, Putt-Putt the car, Pajama Sam, and Spy Fox all together to a desktop near you. The *Super Duper Acrade* series brings some serious fun to your screen at a seriously affordable price.

Sold separately, these CD-ROMs offer four games apiece, six of which are remarkably imaginative. In Arcade 1's *Water Worries*, Freddi Fish must capture the required number of hidden worm noodles before the water level plummets. Players take aim at air bubbles with Freddi's slingshot, while avoiding the jellyfish and wiggler worms that curb their sling-shot power. As with all Humongous games, the higher levels challenge the older child, (here, octopi spray clouds of ink which shroud oncoming evil-doers) but the Jr. Helper options help kids out so that little sister or brother can play too.

In *Balloon-o-rama*, a visually masterful version of *Super Break-out*, you must catch the bouncing Pep in Putt-Putt's plush leather interior. It's fun to watch the somersaulting pooch burst balloons, but get greedy for points and candy and you're bound to lose Pep to the pavement. Three drops and you're out; and losing is no small matter: the face Pep makes when he falls is heart-wrenching.

Super Duper Arcade 2 provides more of the same intelligent entertainment. Spy Fox must steer his multiple environment spy ship through fuel stations without crashing into obstacles in *Hold the Mustard*. The *Q-Bert* style game *Dog on a Stick*, which relies on spatial reasoning, once again places Pep in harm's way. Each disc has its weak link, however (*Sockworks* bores with its obtuse gameplay and *Maze Madness* is *Pac-Man* on depressants) but these games still provide hours of non-violent yet action-packed fun.

— Amy Shafron

SketchBoard Studio

$99, KB Gear Interactive
612-941-1905
www.kbgear.com
Ages 4 to 12

Kids just love to let loose with paint, and here's your chance to encourage their artistic urges without giving yourself hours of clean-up duty. KB Gear Interactive's SketchBoard Studio is a kid-friendly graphics tablet bundled with *Disney's Magic Artist Studio* software.

The tablet's active area measures 7 inches by 5 inches — which is larger than other tablets in its price range — and whatever you draw on the tablet with the included pen appears on your screen. So the closer the tablet matches the size of the screen, the easier it is to control. The tablet's active area is sunken into a large, colorful base that's easy to hold on a lap. The pen can sense 256 different levels of pressure, so if you push down hard, you'll get a thick stroke, and if you lighten up, you'll get a thinner stroke. The pen is connected to the tablet or via a cable, which can get in the way. Also, sometimes the pen gets "stuck" — it won't work, and a green light on the tablet will flash — until you unplug the pen from the tablet and plug it in again.

The pen has one button near the tip, which comes programmed as a single click. This is, I think, a good setting for a small child who's learning the tool. But you can also make it a double-click, a delete, or whatever else strikes your fancy. Using a drawing program, I found it useful to program the button as a delete; then I could select something and delete it, all without using the keyboard.

But the best thing about this package is the inclusion of *Disney's Magic Artist Studio*, which we reviewed in December. As the reviewer noted, this program has some confusing aspects that will baffle a lot of kids, but with your help, they should pick up on it soon enough. And it's fun. Once you learn the ropes, you can create wacky, dancing animations with quirky musical accompaniment. And every time you use a tool you get a guffaw-inducing sound effect. Using the lasso tool to select an object elicits the "Yee-Haw" of a cowboy. Seriously — you might have trouble giving the tablet back to the kids.

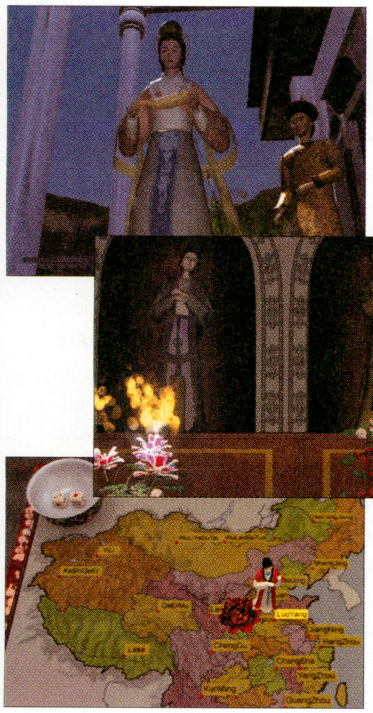
— David Weiss

The Legend of Lotus Spring

$20, Dreamcatcher Games
416/267-2222
www.dreamcatchergames.com
Ages 12 to adult

Exploring *The Legend of Lotus Spring* reminded me of how I felt when I watched the Oscar-winning movie *The English Patient:* visually astounded but for the most part bored. I wanted to love this game because it's the first by Women Wise, a fledgling gaming company focusing on titles for women, an oft overlooked group of gamers. There are plenty of games for kids and men, but the shelves where adventures for ladies might sit collect more dust than product.

Lotus Spring is a romance rich in the historical detail of nineteenth century China with animations to rival Disney, but its pace is too steady to call it an adventure. I explored for several hours and was only taken by surprise once. I like surprises and emotional tugs when I play games, so I would've welcomed more of these jumpstarts. And so the journey of emperor XianFeng to learn what happened to Lotus Spring, his exiled concubine, is a meditative one. Players must visit each of the 16 gorgeous locations in Lotus Haven, collect six items and trigger animations to unravel the love story in Lotus' Dream Diary.



This CD-ROM is the definition of eye candy, but it just wasn't enough to hold my interest. The China-doll cursor was annoying (yet exquisite when she transformed to perform a task), the map was useless (not labeled), there was no 'hint' option for this direction-challenged player (I found myself running around in a few circles), and the story (there isn't even a female lead here, folks), was dull.

So why the gift of 3 1/2 apples? Two reasons. 1) It's the thought that counts — I'm sure Women Wise will get it together and produce quality games for my gender in the future. 2) Just because I didn't like it, because I prefer Annie Hall-type romances, doesn't mean the masses won't eat it up. After all, *The English Patient* won best picture of the year.

— Carolyn Blackburn

Brain Quest

$30, IBM
800-320-8377
www.ibm.com/pc/athome
Ages 6 to 11

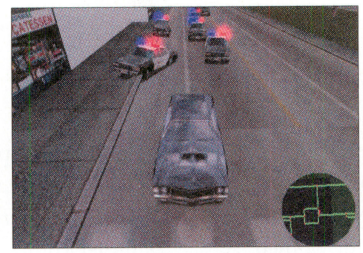
I've taken a lot of heat around the office for comparing *Brain Quest* decks to paint sample stacks, mainly because some of my fellow editors have lost touch with their exterior child. But it does stand to prove that unless you have kids, a lot of stuff passes under your radar undetected. *Brain Quest* decks, Pokemon (although it's kinda hard to ignore them), and the *American Girl* doll phenomenon are all part of being a kid these days. And since today's kids could be considered computer nerds when we compare our skills to theirs, it was only a matter of time before anything they play with in the real world would be translated into the digital one.

If you've not seen a *Brain Quest* deck yet, they're basically a portable *"Jeopardy!"* for kids. Each deck is packed with questions about everything you'd expect your kids to learn about in school — from American history to low level physics. Questions can be as simple as "Who rode his horse through Massachusetts shouting 'The Redcoats are coming!'" or as hard as "Which number is equal to 1/5?" (Okay, maybe that's not so hard, but I'm bad at math.)

Brain Quest has finally made it onto computer screens everywhere thanks to IBM's now flourishing education division (Big Blue has really restructured itself: its education division is now one of the best out there.). Kids from first through sixth grades can now flex their gray matter with questions on all sorts of topics right on their Macs. Each CD comes with over 1000 questions, and more can be downloaded online as they are released. Also, kids can challenge each other over the Internet in a safe and protected arena. If your kids get stumped, they can also connect to World Book Encyclopedia online to get an explanation of an answer. It's enough to make a parent jealous.

— Alex Handy

Big Wheelman



MacSoft gave us some wonderful news for 2000 at Macworld San Francisco. They will soon be bringing Mac gamers two top shelf titles; *Worms: Armageddon* and *Driver. Worms: Armageddon* is a fabulous game whose roots are firmly planted in those old cannon games where you adjust your cannon's angle and power to try and hit your opponent. *Worms: Armageddon* adds new weapons and a whole squad of highly armed, well, worms. These cute little pink guys are packed with everything from machine guns to tactical nuclear weapons. Multiplayer *Worms: Armageddon* is also one of the most fun experiences available on the Internet.

As for *Driver,* what can be said? It's your chance to be Steve McQueen in *Bullit.* You are the wheel man, and your boys are about to come running out of the bank, cash in hands. It's your job to drive like a maniac through the streets of San Francisco, New York, L.A., and Miami. The cops are always on your tail, and there's lots of traffic to deal with as well. Best of all you can watch your car chases in the game's Director Mode. Pick a good camera angle and watch the excitement unfold. Then send off the movie to a friend. You can pull off some amazing scenes, and anyone can play with ease. Look for *Driver* sometime in the second quarter of 2000.
MacSoft, 800-229-2714, www.wizworks.com/macsoft

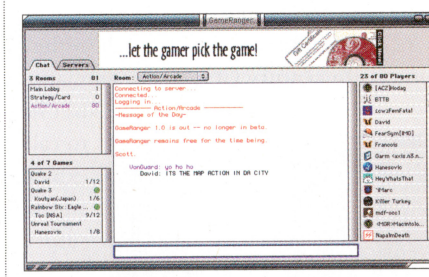
Someone Call Charlton Heston

Freeverse Software, the industry leader in flaming-monkey related software, is currently hard at work on two nifty new projects. The first, HMS Freeverse, is a godsend for anyone who's addicted to card games. Using HMS Freeverse players from around the world can converge on the Internet for fun-filled hours of *Cribbage* and *Spades.* As time goes on, more card games will be added for your cruising pleasure. As it stands right now, *Cribbage* is a blast, although playing against any of Freeverse's staff can be a bit hairy as they tend to be easily distracted during a game.

The second project currently evolving in the bowels of Freeverse is *Burning Monkey Puzzle Lab,* a sick and twisted descendant of *Tetris* and *Dr. Mario.* With numerous variations on gameplay and a blissful multiplayer experience (two players can go head to head on one machine or across the Internet via HMS Freeverse) *Burning Monkey Puzzle Lab* is a surefire blast for Tetris addicts who've been twitching from withdrawal symptoms for the past 10 years. And why is it called Burning Monkey? Well, you'll just have to download *Burning Monkey Solitaire II* to find out. Don't worry, it's a great game and worth the download time.
Freeverse Software, www.freeverse.com

You Don't Have GameRanger Yet?

If you've spent any time playing games online you know how much of a pain in the butt it is to find gamers when you need them. You could use IRC (Internet Relay Chat), ICQ, or AOL Instant Messenger, but they're not really designed for gaming, and you need to know people to play with ahead of time anyway. Well, Scott Kevill, one



of the venerable gods of the Mac gaming world, has created GameRanger to solve this problem. GameRanger is a simple communication program that hosts a massive chat between hundreds of Mac gamers and allows you to start and join multiplayer games without any hassle. The list of supported games is always growing, but there's already an impressive list of games to choose from. *Quake 1, 2,* and *3, Unreal* and *Unreal Tournament, Masters of Orion II, Heroes of Might and Magic 2, A**hole* (The card game) *Bolo, Future Cop LAPD, Railroad Tycoon II, Dark Vengeance, Warcraft II, Age of Empires, Madden 2000,* and *Rainbow 6,* just to name a few. Plans are currently underway to include *Episode One: Pod Racer, Heroes of Might and Magic 3, Total Annihilation, Descent 3, Baldur's Gate,* and *Alpha Centauri.* With a list like that, why wouldn't you download it? Don' be affraid: while the chatting can be crude sometimes, players on GameRanger are generally friendly and are there to play games. You'll never have to search for players again. Head over to *www.gameranger.com* and download your copy today. It's free, it's simple, and it really does kick buttocks.
GameRanger, www.gameranger.com

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FASTER, SMARTER AND MORE INTENSE BATTLES THAN ANY GAME EVER. PERIOD.

"ALL HAIL THE KING OF MULTIPLAYER 3D ACTION" - COMPUTER GAMES

"...QUAKE III WILL REVOLUTIONIZE THE INDUSTRY" - PC MAGAZINE

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www.idsoftware.com

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Mac

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Mac Gamers Battle It Out in San Francisco

The first National Macintosh Gaming Championship of the new millennium took place at this past Macworld Expo, and what a competition it was. The best of the best competed on 32 G4s for more than $25,000 in prizes! While I personally competed in a few competitions, the real star of the show was Ross Wigdor, who single handedly destroyed the competition in almost every first-person perspective shooter. This is the second time Ross has been grand champion and all of us lower-level gamers sincerely hope he moves on to the PGL (Professional Gamers League) soon: he's making us look bad.

Always filled with drama and intrigue, the National Macintosh Gaming Championship was again run by Double Exposure (*www.dexposure.com*) and covered on the web by Mac3d.com. (Special thanks to Mac3d.com for getting us the listing of all the winners in due time.)

You may notice some names repeat quite often in the list of champions. Zack Stern, for example, has built his own Mac gaming empire out of his success in the tournament, and Vance Wallace was the only player who could defeat Ross Wigdor in any first person shooter. Also, Michael Garrison, the first grand national champion, was on hand to claim the Marathon team competition.

Here are the Winners of the national Macintosh Gaming Championship

3 Round Tournaments

Unreal Tournament Ross Wigdor
Marathon Infinity Fred Torres
Myth II Carcharadon Carcharias
Quake II Ross Wigdor
Quake III Ross Wigdor
Starcraft Brett Wood
Carmageddon Kevin Gausson
Dark Vengeance Ross Wigdor
Descent 3 Michael Maitan
Diablo Vance Wallace
F/A-18 Korea Wayne Webster
Galactic Patrol Zack Stern
Galactica Jeff Stansfeld
Lode Runner II Zack Stern
Marathon Infinity (Team) Reed Waller, Michael Garrison
Project Magellan Aaron Daniel
Quake Ross Wigdor
Rainbow Six Ed Rojas
Tomb Raider III Bojan Zimonsa
Total Annihilation Bryan Bell
Unreal Vance Wallace
Warcraft II Matt Wileyader

2 Round Tournaments

Myth II (Team) Mark MacEwen, Shawn Lavin
Quake (Team) Vance Wallace, Ross Wigdor
Quake II (Team) Warner Goff, Dave Mickelson
Starcraft (Team) Brad Ditzell, Josh Roberts
Unreal (Team) Aaron Daniel, Vance Wallace
Unreal Tournament (Team) Aaron Daniel
Warcraft II (Team) Bronwyn Gangnes, Olin Wread

1 Round Tournaments

Age of Empires G. Stone
Civilization II Gold Caraharadon Carchanas
Madden NFL 2000 Zack Stern

Wand of Wonder

Ambrosia Software, the ever vigilant gods of shareware gaming on the Mac were present in a unique way at Macworld San Francisco. Jason Whong, Ambrosia's mouthpiece and resident bug eater, played the part of Ambrosia's expo booth by strapping software awards to himself and walking the show floor, an original idea indeed. You may remember that some months ago Jason declared that if Ambrosia shipped any products with bugs in them, he would eat bugs at Macworld New York this July. Well, lo and behold, Ambrosia managed to miss a few bugs in *Cythera* and now Jason is locked into eating an insectoid salad in July. All bug munching aside, Ambrosia is now shipping *Ferazel's Wand* (Pronounced Fair-âz-elle), an amazingly sadistic platform game. In addition to amazing gameplay, *Fearzel's Wand* features a top shelf sound track which took literally years to compose. Taking gameplay ideas from such monster console games as *Super Mario Brothers, Sonic the Hedgehog,* and *Rayman, Ferazel's Wand* will keep any platform lover busy for hours. *Ferazel* is also the first title Ambrosia is selling only on CD, so you'll have to scoot on over to their Website to order a copy.

$30, Ferazel's Wand, Ambrosia Software, www.ambrosiasw.com

Genesis 5-13

Every gamer had his or her first system. Whether you cut your teeth on a Nintendo Entertainment System or an Atari 2600, you never forget your first. My own favorite system of years past has to be the Sega Genesis. Fortunately for Genesis fans, Sega has kept quiet on the emulation issue. Because of Sega's complacency, emux.com has amassed a monstrous archive of Genesis games for your perusal. Grab a copy of DGen (The current popular Genesis emulator for Macintosh) from emulation.net, head over to emux.com and you'll be in hog heaven. Legally we can't condone downloading any games for the emulator that you don't already own, so don't get too carried away.

Emux.com, emulation.net

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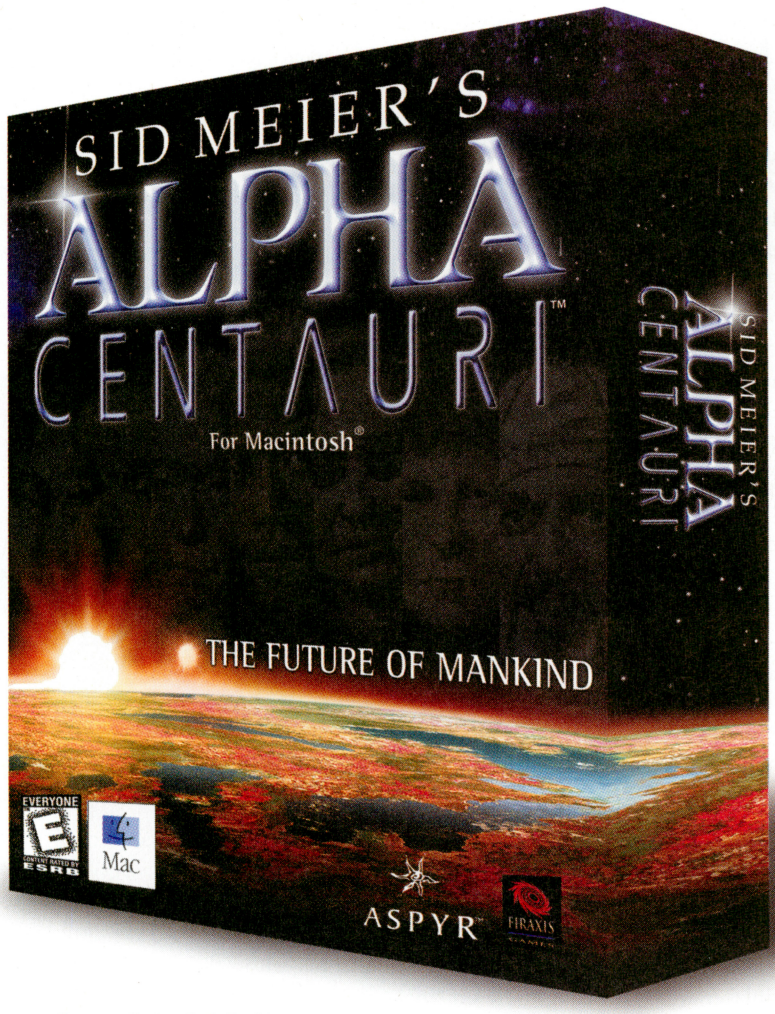
- Newsweek



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Grudge Match

The Quake 3 Arena and Unreal Tournament Finally Rumble

While the graphics world fights over the benefits of InDesign versus Quark, and the Web page gurus bicker over the wonders of BBEdit and CyberStudio, we gamers have been patiently awaiting the arrival of our own titans for clashing. *Quake 3 Arena* by Activision and *Unreal Tournament* by MacSoft have finally arrived and are taking the world by storm. They're making headlines everywhere, whether it's due to their deplorable violence or phenomenal gameplay. So, rabid gamers, we've taken these two heavyweights and set them on each other like dogs so that we might find out which is truly the king of online, multiplayer, first person-perspective shoot-em-up. (or OMFPPSEU — the unpronounceable).

The Sins of the Father

The final plunge into dedicated online play was not an easy one for either *Quake 3* or *Unreal Tournament.* While the original *Quake* was a huge hit and clogged modems and Ethernet connections worldwide, the sequel fell flat in the multiplayer arena, focusing more on single-player gameplay than fans had wanted. Thus, some *Quake* maniacs feel as though *Quake 3 Arena* is the true heir to the *Quake* name, leaving behind some of the tarnish it garnered in its second manifestation. But with a return to its roots comes the same problems that plagued the original *Quake:* gameplay balance and the newbie factor. For starters, balance was one thing *Quake* lacked; good players could easily dominate a game with just a little know-how, and once you got the rocket launcher you were pretty much in command. *Quake 3* seeks to rectify this problem by toning down the weapons and decreasing the power of most of them. There's still plenty of oomph when you need it, but when a rocket detonates near you, you're no longer guaranteed to be splattered.

The original *Quake* was also rather unfriendly to new users. While it was fairly simple to play once you learned the basics, online play was daunting since most online players were fairly skilled and totally merciless. *Unreal* suffered from this problem as well, although it was never as widely accepted for online play as *Quake* was, since players had to install patch after patch after patch to get an acceptable multiplayer experience. So how do you teach new players how to deathmatch without having to worry about the highly competitive gaming populace? The answer is bots.

Domo Arigato, Mr. Roboto

Bots are computer programs designed to kick your butt. Instead of playing a game of *Quake 3* or *Unreal Tournament* online, you can hang up your modem and challenge a herd of bots instead. Unless you're a die-hard *Quake* veteran, you'll probably never notice the difference between bots and real players. Both *Unreal Tournament* and *Quake 3 Arena* use bots to teach newbies how to play. You start out at a skill level of your choosing *(Unreal Tournament's* bots have more skill levels to choose from) and fight bots of increasingly greater skill until you've got the basics. Each game's bots are entirely different birds. *Quake 3's* resident robots are fairly realistic and usually imitate real players quite accurately. While there are fewer skill levels than in *Unreal Tournament,* most of its extra skill levels are on the higher end of the skill chart, and thus irrelevant to a newbie. One key difference between the two game's bots comes in the error imitation processes. Both types of bots are designed to screw up to imitate humans more accurately (let's face it, if the computer wanted to win, it would never miss). Unfortunately, when *Unreal Tournament's* bots mess up, it's usually in a repetitive or moronic way. In one *Unreal Tournament* level, for example, there is a pressure chamber with a few power-ups inside. If one player enters the cham-

ber, another can press a button to close the door and squish everyone inside the chamber. After dying once, a real player would learn never to go in there, but the *Unreal* bots never quite figure this out and will charge into the chamber headlong with you right behind them to slam the door and hit the pressurize button. *Quake*'s bots show a generally higher level of intelligence and ability to improvise. For those of you in the mood for a good challenge, however, any bot on the highest difficulty level will always win. Unless you're a god, you're not going to beat any of these bots on the highest level.

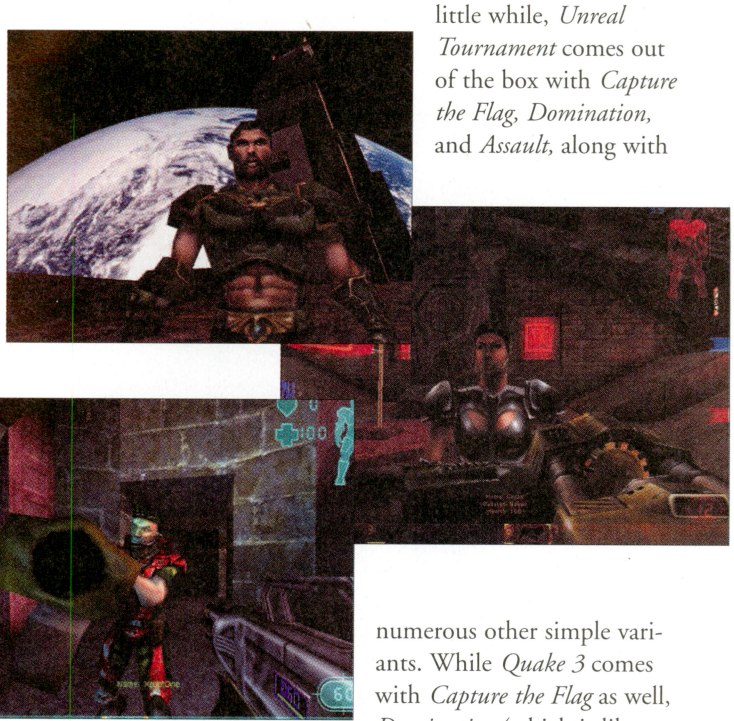
But bots alone do not a game make. When you get right down to it, the level design is just as if not more important than the instructions, tutorial, and single-player modes combined. Level design was a hallmark of the first *Quake.* Most levels were compact and highly intricate, allowing players to get to any skirmish in seconds. As online deathmatch grew in popularity, map makers started to branch out into new territory. Anyone who's played *Real Capture the Flag* (an original *Unreal* conversion) or *Starsiege Tribes* knows the fun that can be had on a battlefield map; that is a level with two bases separated by vast expanses of open ground. *Unreal Tournament* has a few capture the flag and assault levels that are quite vast, giving them the feel of a real-world location. The former king of this category, *Quake,* has been shown up with impunity by newcomer *Unreal Tournament.* This is not to say that *Quake*'s cramped and claustrophobia-inducing levels aren't up to snuff; they're easily the best *Quake* levels we've yet seen. But *Unreal Tournament* goes that extra mile, putting its levels in all manner of locales and festooning battlegrounds with excellent details and small finishing touches. Almost all of *Quake*'s levels have the same dark brooding feel that has permeated every id game. Most *Quake* levels are done in the same drab color schemes and feature an abundance of recurring themes (most of which have something to do with crucifixes in compromising positions. Come on id, aren't we over the 'anti-Christianity' thing yet? It's so early 90s). *Unreal Tournament* 's levels are full of life and innovation. Some levels take place in the upper atmosphere of Earth, giving them lower gravity. Others take place on speeding interstellar space ships: One false move and you're sucking vacuum. *Unreal Tournament*'s levels have a distinct feeling of reality; you can believe that these places exist or may exist someday. *Quake 3*'s levels are simply maps on which to play *Quake*; they have very little personality to them. For example, both games revel in the idea of bottomless pits around the outside of a level, but *Unreal Tournament* gives the idea more panache by placing the player on top of buildings towering over the Earth rather than on nondescript platforms floating in blackness, as *Quake 3* does.

Map Maker, Map Maker ...

This map analogy sums up the competition quite nicely. *Quake* simply doesn't have the life to it that *Unreal* does. It's the same thing that made people prefer *Duke Nukem 3D* to *Quake* or *Doom.* There's simply more love in *Unreal Tournament. Quake* feels like a culmination of a research project in optimal deathmatching; *Unreal Tournament* feels like a return to playing cowboys and Native Americans in your backyard. And isn't that what most gamers want, anyway?

It all comes down to heart. *Unreal Tournament* simply has more heart and character than *Quake 3. Quake 3* is not necessarily less of a game because of this; it's simply not the right game for the newcomer. Anyone new to the world of online, multiplayer, first person-perspective shoot-em-ups will find *Unreal Tournament* to be a more rewarding experience than *Quake 3.* But for the die-hard *Quake* addict, *Quake 3* will definitely provide many hours of enjoyable mindless gameplay. *Quake 3* is an id game, and therefore has the fastest, goriest gameplay available.

But where *Quake 3* won't have user-made conversions for a little while, *Unreal Tournament* comes out of the box with *Capture the Flag, Domination,* and *Assault,* along with numerous other simple variants. While *Quake 3* comes with *Capture the Flag* as well, *Domination* (which is like being king of the hill with three or four hills) and Assault (which is like playing cops and robbers: The robbers are trying to rob the bank, and the cops are trying to stop them before time runs out) add a lot more replay value to *Unreal Tournament* — value that's guaranteed because the variants are widespread. No more hunting the Internet for the other three players who have the same conversion you do.



Unreal Tournament has shaken the bug ghost of its predecessor and even manages to be more reliable than *Quake 3 Arena* (although, some of *Quake*'s stability issues are related to the 3dfx Voodoo3 card we used on the test machine). The battle for supremacy has been squarely won by *Unreal Tournament.* Sitting down to a game of *Unreal Tournament* is simply more rewarding and satisfying than playing *Quake 3.* While *Quake 3* still provides the best twitch gameplay experience out there, if you don't have the reflexes necessary to win, you probably won't enjoy it as much.

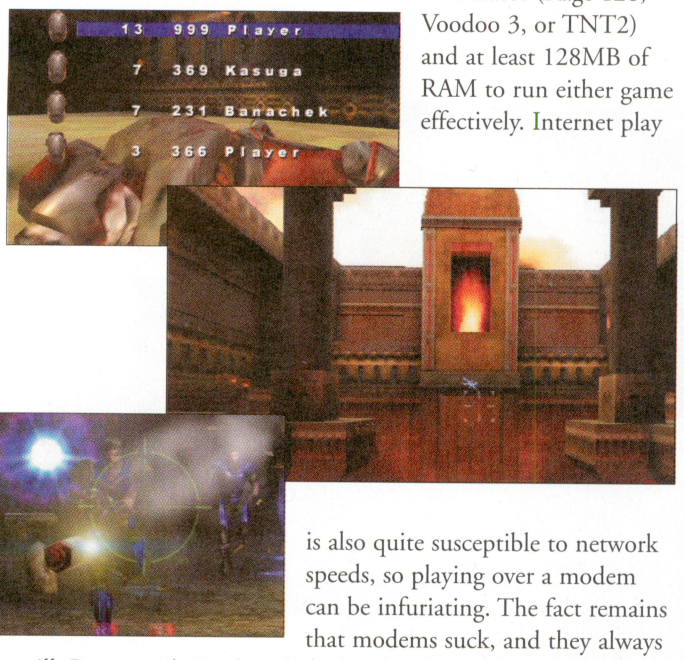
Continued on pg. 56

Continued from page 55

This Is the End

There are a few issues with *Unreal Tournament*, however. The version we received for review did lose a little speed compared to the betas and demos we played earlier in the development cycle. Occasionally the animation halts during gameplay — but once you've explored a level fully, the halting stops. The interface is a little quirky too, and can lag behind the mouse. Compared to *Quake 3*'s interface , however, *Unreal Tournament* is the clear winner.

As you may have guessed, you'll need one heck of a machine to play either game reliably. You'll need a third-generation 3D accelerator (Rage 128, Voodoo 3, or TNT2) and at least 128MB of RAM to run either game effectively. Internet play



is also quite susceptible to network speeds, so playing over a modem can be infuriating. The fact remains that modems suck, and they always will. But considering how little bandwidth you have to work with over a modem, *Quake 3* and *Unreal Tournament* perform quite admirably.

So if you're trying to decide which one of these two massive kick-butt games to get, my advice is to get both. Newbies will appreciate *Unreal Tournament* much more, but *Quake 3* is not impossible for the new player to pick up. If you need your *Quake* fix, you will not be disappointed by *Quake 3 Arena.* But if you're in the mood for something new, *Unreal Tournament* has definitely taken the genre to a new level.

— Alex Handy

Unreal Tournament

$50, MacSoft
800-229-2714
www.wizworks.com/macsoft

Quake 3 Arena

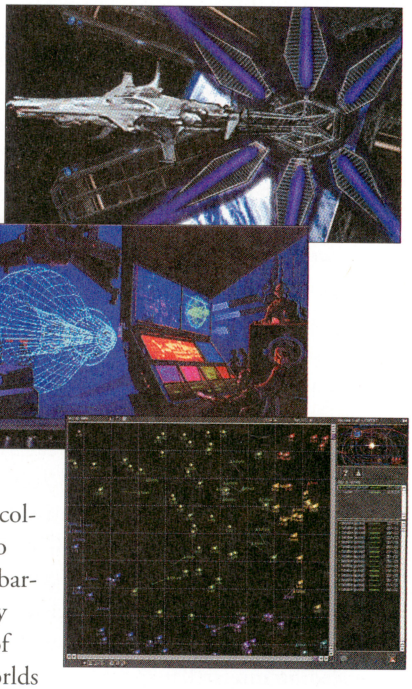
$50, Activision
www.activision.com

Galactica - Anno Dominari

$20, Monkey Byte
www.mbyte.com

Monkey Byte has struck a blow for all you fans of space-opera games. If you loved *Masters of Orion II* or *Pax Imperia*, you'll drool all over yourself for *Galactica.* While it may not be the flashiest game around, it's dead simple and immensely satisfying. *Galactica* is definitely not a treat for the eyes. The graphics are bland and simple (the rendered images are quite nice, though) and the interface is rather spartan. But what strategy fan needs graphics to tickle the eyes when there's so much good solid gameplay to be had?

Galactica follows the standard space-opera plot line: You are the ruler of a rising regime in a universe that's been recovering from the breakup of a long dead empire. You have vowed to reconstruct that empire and spread your people throughout the stars. Unfortunately, your claim to the throne is contested by rival factions, and interstellar war has broken out. In *Galactica* there is no diplomacy, no ship designing, no simulated tactical combat. All that matters is your sweeping vision of your future empire. You must colonize worlds (there are no uninhabitable planets or barren solar systems to worry about) and build a fleet of battleships to take the worlds that happen to be controlled by your enemies.



One thing that makes *Galactica* stand out in the field of space-opera games is the ability to set up rendezvous points in deep space, outside of solar systems. This helps a lot because there is no need to bunch up your fleets around a single planet while waiting for reinforcements to arrive. While it may not sound like a big advantage, it actually turns out to be an improvement that has been lacking in every other space-opera game that has come before.

Network play is excellent, if lengthy, and there is almost no lag. This is a game you can play with a friend for a month or so, adding a few minutes of play each day. However, if your friend is not a die-hard strategy fan he or she may be put off by the game's spartan attitude.

— Alex Handy

Heroes of Might and Magic III

$40, 3DO
www.3do.com

My life has been destroyed by a single game, and that game is *Heroes of Might and Magic III*. There is no escape; there is no salvation. Once you start a game, you're hooked clear through to the end. The *Heroes* series has always been addictive, but this third installment offers up even more of what makes the series incredible.

A brief synopsis of the series thus far: The world of *Might and Magic* is vast in scale and filled with all manner of fantastic beasts and peoples. Most creatures in the game are directly drawn from mythology, such as harpies, Minotaurs, gorgons, and everything else you'd expect from the Greeks. There's also a healthy heaping of *D&D* and Tolkien characters, such as dwarves, elves, orcs, goblins, and all manner of undead. Into this world you are flung and told to conquer the realm. You play a king and start out with control of a town and one hero. Your hero has, under his or her command, an army of fantastic creatures that he or she commands in battle. Your town is the source of these creatures, and as time passes, you can upgrade buildings in your town. You can build things such as a labyrinth, which will allow you to recruit Minotaurs into your army, or a gate to hell to bring demons into your fold. There are hundreds of creatures, each one with two forms (Griffins are strong but Royal Griffins are stronger) and their own special powers. The heroes who command your armies are just as diverse and claim professions such as Heretic, Barbarian, Wizard, and Knight. Each hero has his or her own special power, such as exceptional skill at commanding swordsmen in battle.

Gameplay is turn-based and you move your hero and army across the map exploring and gathering treasure. And what would a fantasy game be without some evil overlord trying to take over the world? (Of course, you can play the evil overlord and try to smudge out the beacons of virtue as well.) While you explore the world, conquer towns, and gather resources (gold, iron, wood, sulfur, gems, etc.), your opponents are trying to do the same thing, and there's never enough room for everyone to get along.

Playing a game of *Heroes of Might and Magic III* is like stepping into another world. With eight games worth of story to draw on, there's no shortage of intrigue and mystery. The *Might and Magic* world is extremely rich, and old fans of the series will love this new installment. But, unlike previous versions, *Heroes III* is much more forgiving and open to the newbie. There are no more random attacks, as there were in previous installments: Now you'll only be attacked by other heroes or when you confront monsters on the map. This allows for a lot of saved load time, which used to mostly be spent recovering your last saved game when your hero died unexpectedly. Otherwise, the gameplay remains the same as in the first two versions. 3DO has kept its hands out of the cookie dough and stayed with the motto "If it ain't broke … " — a good thing considering that the first two games were universally lauded throughout the games industry.

Graphically, *Heroes III* makes the same steps forward that its previous installments made, adding more colors, more animations, and crisper characters than before. And since the game isn't in 3D, you can run it on fairly old equipment — say a 604 PowerPC chip or better, although the game is said to run on 603s as well. This is a perfect game for the strategy fan in your life. Battles play out more like chess than a video game, and there is very little blood to be seen. While some themes aren't for the faint of heart (the idea of playing a demonic knight might put some people off), there is something here for every kind of player.

With any luck GameRanger will soon support *Heroes III*, and if it does, multiplayer games will be even easier to set up than they are now. While games are easy to organize already, they'll be a breeze with GameRanger. Multiplayer games play out well, and the only problem is the long wait between turns. Since each player has to make all of his or her moves, however, there's not much that can be done about these long wait times.

Heroes III is a well polished piece of art. It is almost infinitely replayable and will keep you happily addicted.

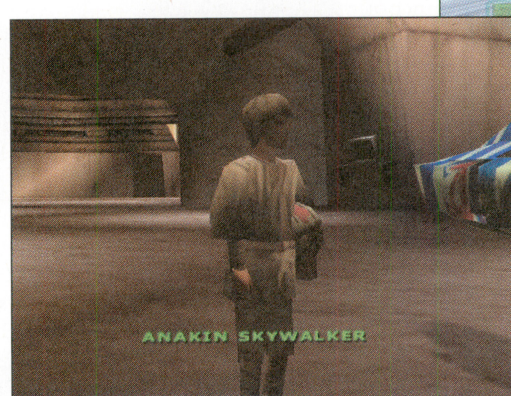
— Alex Handy

Star Wars Episode One: Pod Racer

$40, Lucas Arts
www.lucasarts.com

Pod Racer is a mixed blessing. It's one of the most attractive games to come down the pike in a while, and it's the first racing game for the Mac in years. Unfortunately, *Pod Racer* carries some of the same baggage as the movie it was spawned from. In the same way *Episode One* falls short of the greatness of the first three movies, *Pod Racer* falls short of the high water mark of previous *Star Wars* games such as *Tie Fighter* and *X-Wing*.

For those of you unfamiliar with pod racing, it's a bit like chariot racing, but instead of horses, competitors hold the reins of jet engines. Racers can reach speeds of over 600 mph (funny how a galaxy far, far away uses miles too), which can make for some pretty cool-looking crashes and fender benders. You can choose from 25 different pods, each of which is distinct with its own advantages and disadvantages. Of course, Anakin Skywalker and Sebulba are here to choose from, along with all your other favorite characters who appeared in the movie for two seconds. There are even a few that weren't on the big screen.



In addition to the traditional track on Tatooine, there are 21 tracks to choose from. These are spread out across eight distinct planets: the obligatory snow-and-ice planet, fire-and-lava planet, and swamp-and-forest planet are all here. The tracks are, for the most part, challenging and fun to explore, but you won't have much time to sight-see, since you'll be blowing past all the major tourist spots at 500 mph.

The one thing *Pod Racer* distinctly lacks, however, is challenging competition. In fact, your computerized opponents are so bad that after a few rounds of practice, you'll be lucky to see any of them for the rest of the game. With only a little bit of skill you can heartily defeat the computer by insane margins. I was able to make it all the way through 12 races before I saw an opponent pass me, even when I crashed. Add this to the fact that most of the later tracks take upward of eight minutes to complete, and you're going to be alone way out in front for a long time. Possibly the worst sin a video game can commit is to be boring, and *Pod Racer* is due for some heavy confession, thanks to its limp artificial intelligence.

In an attempt to adhere to the movie, Lucas Arts allows players to repair their pods in the middle of a race, much the way Anakin does before the end of his race in the movie. Since repairing requires you to slow down, however, it is often faster to simply smack into a wall and crash, after which you'll be returned to the track fully repaired and gaining speed. This all but kills the fantasy, pulling you out of the game's world in seconds. And what is a *Star Wars* game if you don't feel like you're really in the world of *Star Wars*?

In between races you can visit Watto's shop to purchase upgrades for your pod racer. However, after each race, you also gain access to new pods with higher speeds, better turning, and quicker acceleration. Because of this it is possible to go through the entire game without ever setting foot inside Watto's shop. Again, this takes away from the fantasy, turning *Pod Racer* into less of a racing simulation than an arcade game.

Pod Racer isn't a bad game, it's just not one a mature gamer will find satisfying. Kids will probably love it, however, and if your son or daughter is still into *Star Wars* it'll make a good birthday present. But if you're considering buying yourself a copy, you can expect to delete the game from your hard drive after a day or two. But hey, at least it'll run on an iBook, and multiplayer games are definitely fun if you have a LAN or AirPort network. Most people find this hard to come by, though, and since you need an iMac or better to run the game, most people will never get to enjoy an eight-player network game.

— Alex Handy

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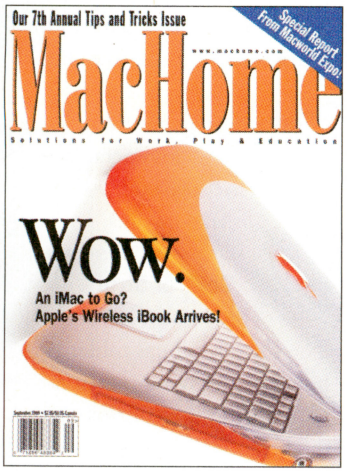

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By Chris McVeigh

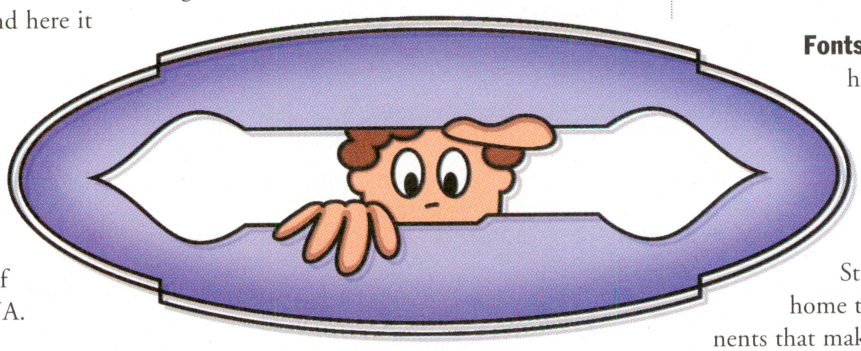
System Folder Roundup

Understanding the many components of the Mac OS

The Macintosh Operating System (Mac OS) is the set of software that governs your Macintosh. Its many pieces are housed together in the System Folder, a permanent resident of your hard drive.

In spite of the smiling Mac OS logo that brands it, the System Folder has a reputation for being somewhat unruly. Peer inside and you'll discover a horde of mysterious folders and files that beg for a description. And here it is.

System The System file contains the core code that operates your Macintosh. Think of it as your Mac's DNA.



Finder The Finder is the omnipresent application that allows you to see the contents of your hard drive, manage your files, and launch applications.

System Resources The System Resources file contains additional software components required by the system.

Mac OS ROM The Mac OS ROM file is a component of the system software meant to replicate the ROM (Read Only Memory) chip traditionally found on the computer's motherboard. This file describes your model of Macintosh and its technological parameters so that the system software knows what kind of machine it is operating.

Extensions Extensions are additions to the system software that extend the functionality of your Macintosh. For example, the QuickTime extensions allow your Macintosh to display video, while the Apple CD/DVD Driver lets your Macintosh access CDs and DVDs. Extensions are often teamed with a Control Panel that can adjust the extension's settings.

Control Panels Control panels are additions to the system software that allow you to specify a variety of settings, from the date and time to your desktop background. Although control panels tend to work in tandem with Extensions, it is not uncommon to find a self-contained control panel that extends the system's behavior.

Preferences Applications and control panels use the Preferences folder to store a variety of settings, including such things as the position of windows and toolbars, Web browser bookmarks, joystick configurations, and screen names.

Fonts The Fonts folder houses the typefaces used by your Macintosh.

Control Strip Modules The Control Strip Modules folder is home to the system components that make up the control strip found at the bottom of your Mac's display. The control strip provides quick access to many control panel functions, allowing you to set system preferences without the bother of opening and closing several control panels.

Apple Menu Items The Apple Menu Items folder contains exactly what it suggests — items found in the Apple Menu. The function of the Apple menu is to provide quick access to frequently used items. You can add any item to the Apple menu simply by dragging an alias of the application, document or Web address to this folder.

CHRIS MCVEIGH

Startup Items Items placed in the Startup Items folder are automatically opened once the Macintosh has started up. Let's say you'd like your Web browser to launch and log on to your home page every time you start your computer. To do this, you need only place an alias of either Netscape communicator or Internet explorer in the Startup Items folder.

Shutdown Items Items placed in the Shutdown Items folder are automatically launched when you choose to shut down your Macintosh. It may seem like somewhat of an oddity. After all, why would you want to start an application after you choose to shut down your computer? Still, it does serve a purpose. For example, the Umax VistaScan installs a small application into the Shutdown items folder that turns the scanner off when you shut down your Macintosh.

Contextual Menu Items The contextual menu is a subtle enhancement to the Macintosh user interface that has gone largely unnoticed by the majority of Mac users. Go to the Finder, hold down the control key, and click on an icon. A menu appears, listing several options for that file. Functionality is added to the contextual menu by adding additional modules to the Contextual Menu Items folder.

Internet Search Sites This folder contains plug-ins that enhance the functionality of Sherlock, the Mac OS's advanced search engine. These plug-ins allow you to search specific online magazines and Internet shopping sites and search engines.

Language & Region Support The Language & Region Support folder contains files that enable different languages on your Macintosh, including French, Japanese, and Danish.

Launcher Items The Mac OS includes a Control Panel called Launcher, which allows you to open applications and files from a convenient panel. Dragging and dropping an item to the Launcher adds it to the panel, and when you do this, an alias of the item is added to the Launcher Items folder.

PrintMonitor Documents This folder contains temporary documents as they are being printed. The folder is empty unless a print job is taking place or the print queue has been stopped.

Scripts and Scripting Additions These folders include AppleScript-related items. Scripting Additions contains several files that extend the functionality of AppleScript, while Scripts is home to a selection of AppleScripts that tidy the Finder.

Help This folder contains the Mac OS Help Center and other help files, including DVD Player Help and AppleScript Help.

Text Encodings The Text Encoding folder contains a series of files required to convert and display text of varying languages.

Appearance The Appearance folder contains desktop pictures, sound sets, and theme files to be used with the Appearance control panel. While desktop pictures are plentiful, third-party sound sets and theme files are scarce.

Clipboard The clipboard is a file that stores any item that you have copied. This item will remain in the clipboard until something else replaces it.

Scrapbook File This file contains the items you've pasted into the Scrapbook.

Application Support This folder contains support files used by third-party applications. It might seem odd that some applications store frequently used files within the System Folder, instead of their own folder. A software publisher might make several applications that use the same support files, however, and storing them in the System Folder avoids duplication.

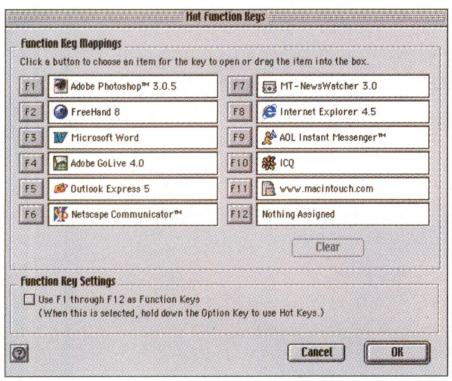
ColorSync Profiles ColorSync is the technology developed by Apple that helps insure the color you see on your display matches the color output of your printer. The ColorSync Profiles folder contains ColorSync profiles for your monitor, printer and any other imaging devices you might have connected to your Macintosh.

MacTCP DNR This mysterious file contains important information about your network and/or Internet connection. Technically, it's a preference file, but Apple has yet to file it properly. MH

Functional Function Keys

Although your Macintosh keyboard has a row of 12 function keys, chances are good you've never actually used them. Macintosh applications rarely make use of these extra keys, and for many users they remain a mystery. Thankfully, Apple has finally recognized this bewilderment. Mac OS 9's revamped Keyboard control panel lets you assign a task to each key just by dragging and dropping.

Open the Keyboard control panel and click on the Function Keys... button at the bottom of the window. A new window titled Hot Function Keys appears, listing the 12 keys with the words Nothing Assigned in adjacent text boxes. Let's say you'd like to launch Microsoft Word simply by pressing the F1 key. To do this, you need only drag and drop the Microsoft Word icon to the box marked F1. You can repeat this procedure, assigning different applications to each function key. Your most frequently used documents can also be accessed in the same manner. And you're certainly not limited to applications and files, either. Assign AppleScripts to the function keys to empty the trash or close a window with a single keystroke.



Another clever idea is to assign Web addresses to each function key, the quicker to visit your favorite Websites. Create a folder on your desktop called Bookmarks. Launch Internet Explorer and visit your favorite site. Now, click once on the address bar and press command-A to select all. Drag that text to the Bookmarks folder on your desktop. You've just created an Internet clipping. Anytime you double-click on that file, you'll be immediately whisked to that site. (Netscape Communicator does not support drag-and-drop Internet addresses. You can still create them, however, by typing the address into the Note Pad and dragging the text to the desktop.) Now drag your Internet clipping onto a function key of your choice. Anytime you want to visit that site, simply press the corresponding function key. Your Web browser will automatically launch, connect to the Internet if required, and load the site for you.

At the base of the Hot Function Keys window, you'll see a box titled Function Key Settings. Uncheck the listed option. This allows you to press a single function key to activate your actions. Otherwise, you'll need to hold down the Option key as you press a function key.

Unfortunately, the Hot Key feature does not function on older Macintoshes. If you do not see a button titled Function Keys at the bottom on the Keyboard control panel, your Macintosh is unable to support this feature.

A Spare Set of System Software

Ever run into a problem with your Mac, and wished you had a perfect copy of the System Folder on hand? It would save a lot of time if you could just swap System Folders instead of reinstalling the Mac OS from scratch. Next time you install a fresh set of system software and secondary system components, click on your System Folder and press Command-D to make a duplicate of it. Store the duplicate in your Utilities folder or somewhere else you can access it, a Zip disk, maybe, when needed. The next time you run into problems with your Macintosh, place the duplicate System Folder at the root level of your hard drive, where your current System Folder sits. Open the current System Folder, locate the System file, and drag it to the trash. Now, open the duplicate System Folder and watch for its folders to adopt the standard system folder icons. (For example, the Apple menu items folder will adopt an Apple icon.) This means the duplicate System Folder has become the current System Folder. Drag the old System Folder to the trash, remove the word "copy" from the end of the duplicate System Folder, and restart. Now you'll be using a fresh set of system software that has been untainted by crashes or other scarring influences. Make another copy of your System Folder and store it in a convenient location just in case anything else goes wrong.

share your tips!

Got some tips you'd like to share with your fellow *MacHome* readers? Please send them to us at:

chris @ machome.com

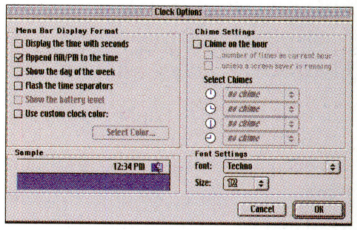
All mail is assumed intended for publication, and we reserve the right to edit tips for brevity and clarity. When sending your tips, please make sure to include your full name.

Simple Short Cuts

The Mac OS offers several keyboard shortcuts to help you avoid repetitive mouse work, such as pulling down menus and selecting commands. Instead of dragging items to the trash, you can simply click on the document icon and press Command-Delete. Instead of using the application menu to switch applications, you can simply press Command-Tab to cycle through open programs. Instead of closing each window individually, you can close all open windows by pressing Option-Command-W. Finally, you can quit any application simply by pressing Command-Q.

Mismatched Menu Fonts?

After you install Mac OS 9, you might find that the font for Date and Time (in the top right of the menu bar) no longer matches your standard menu font. This is because the Date and Time font is now set independently of the System font. To match both fonts, open the Date & Time control panel and, at the base of the window, click on the button titled Clock Options.... In the window that appears, you'll see a box titled Font Settings in the lower right. Simply select the font and size that matches your current system font, click OK, and close the control panel. Remember that if you change your System font again, you'll have to go back to the Date & Time control panel and change the time font as well.



Mac OS Update Watch

Apple DVD Software 2.0
The final release version of Apple's software-only DVD decoder offers improvements in playback and corrects audio sync problems plaguing the beta release included with iMac DVs and Power Macintosh G4s. It's not intended for Power Macintosh G3s or PowerBook G3s with a hardware decoding card. Available at http://asu.info.apple. com/swupdates.nsf/artnum/n11558.

Mac OS 9 Audio Update 1.1
Provides support for the Harmon Kardon iSub subwoofer for the new slot-loading iMacs. It also improves playback of DVD movies on iMac DVs, eliminating audio sync problems. Get it at http://asu.info. apple.com/swupdates.nsf/artnum/n11553.

Mac OS 9 Software Update 1.1
This minor update improves the speed and efficiency of Mac OS 9's automatic software update feature. The update requires Mac OS 9 and can be found at http://asu.info.apple.com/swupdates.nsf/artnum/n11554.

iMac DVD-ROM Update 1.1
This software updates the firmware of the DVD-ROM drives shipping in the new iMac DVs. The iMac DV occasionally locks up your system for a long time while it attempts to determine whether or not a questionable CD-ROM can actually be read. DVD-ROM Update 1.1 improves the drive's ability to read questionable discs and lessens the time to decide a if CD-ROM is unreadable. The update can be found at http://asu.info.apple.com/swupdates.nsf/artnum/n11555.

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By Chris McVeigh

Mac OS 9 and Word 98, Printer Persuasion, and That Annoying Voice

Q Since installing Mac OS 9 and Microsoft Word 98, my File menu no longer lists an option to Get Info. This was a handy feature, allowing me to lock, unlock and change the amount of memory allocated to an application. When I use Sherlock 2, I can actually see Get Info in the File menu, but it is grayed out. Do you know how I can get the option to come back? I thought it might be due to Word 98, but I can't trash it and reinstall since the application is locked and I have no access to the Get Info menu!

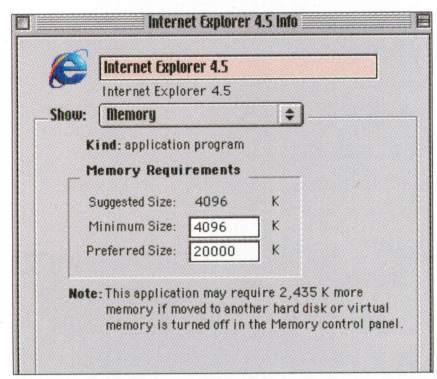
Larry Gosselin

A Unfortunately, an error occurred during the installation of Mac OS 9 that activated the Simple Finder. Simple Finder is a standard option that scales down the Finder, providing only essential features and commands in an effort to protect the system from passersby with busy fingers. Although infuriating, the fix is rather simple. While in the Finder, select Preferences from the Edit menu. Click on the tab the marked General. Simple Finder is the first option listed, and you should find it checked off. Unclick this option and close the Preferences window. Get Info will once again be listed under the file menu.

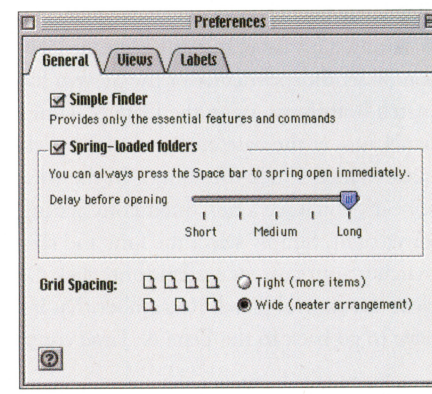
Q I just bought a new G4 and I have just finished moving my files to it from my older iMac. When I open documents, I get messages that certain fonts are missing or cannot be displayed. I've installed Adobe Acrobat and Adobe Type Manager, but they do not seem to help. Do you have a solution?

Steven Ward

A Actually, Steven, your problem is not directly related to either Adobe Type Manager or Adobe Acrobat. When you add new fonts to your Macintosh, they're stored in the Fonts folder within the System Folder. Thus, to transport your fonts from one computer to another, you must copy them from Font folder of the first computer. Go to your iMac, open



the System Folder and locate the Fonts folder (it's the one with the A on the folder). Look inside and you'll find all your missing fonts. You need to drag these fonts to a Zip disk (or whatever removable media you're using), take the disk to your new G4, then drag those fonts to the Fonts folder within the G4's System Folder. You may receive a message that reads "You cannot replace Font XYZ because is in use." This happens when you try to replace a font that already exists in the Fonts folder. Should



this happen, simply add the fonts one by one, trashing any duplicates that you've copied from the iMac. Once you're done you can restart your Macintosh. Assuming you've copied all fonts that you require, it should be smooth sailing from here on in.

Q I've got a 333MHz iMac with 160MB of RAM, and yet Internet Explorer seems to bog down the more pages I visit during a session. After about 10 or 15 web pages, I can speed things up by quitting the application and then reopening it. I've specified a 50MB cache, but that doesn't seem to help. Got any ideas?

Jack de Golia

A You're running into a familiar problem. Despite the fact that your iMac has 160 MB of RAM, your Web browser simply isn't getting enough. Internet Explorer is preconfigured to claim only 6.5 MB of RAM (4 MB if virtual memory is active). Unfortunately, the Mac OS does not dish out memory space as required. Once Explorer's 6.5 MB of RAM is full, the application starts to

buckle. As you have noticed, this can cause slowdowns that you've remedied by quitting the application and relaunching it. This is a tiresome process, and thankfully, there's a more permanent fix. Locate Internet Explorer on your hard drive and highlight it by clicking once on its icon. Select Get Info from the File menu. A window appears showing general information about the application. Choose Memory from the pop-up menu near the top of the window. You can now expand the amount of RAM used by Internet Explorer. In the Preferred Size box, type in 20,000 and close the window. The next time you launch Internet explorer it will demand 20MB of RAM instead of a paltry 6.5MB. This should significantly improve your Web browsing.

Q I have an iMac running Mac OS 8.6 and an Epson Stylus 740. I received messages with Outlook Express that look perfectly formed, but when I print the messages, lines seem to run too wide and a few words are carried over to the next line, leaving a long blank space before the next line begins. My temporary solution has been to select the entire message and copy it to AppleWorks before printing. There must be a simple answer that I am overlooking.

John W. Deinema

A An email message undergoes several formatting changes as it makes it way to its destination. The most obvious alteration is the insertion of hard returns at the end of each horizontal line of text. This is akin to going through the message manually and inserting a return at the end of each line, much like an old typewriter. Once the message arrives, it can be viewed properly so long as the message window is of sufficient width. The message must be adjusted for the page width of your printer, however. A single line of text that you see on screen may be too wide for the printer. This forces the line to be truncated and parts of the text carried over to the next line. The hard returns remain, however, preventing the text from wrapping properly and leaving small bits of orphaned text every second line. The good news is that there's a simple fix. To ensure that messages are printed correctly, you need to decrease the size of the text. The smaller the text, the more likely a single line will squeeze onto the printer's page and the less likely you are to experience the staggered text. Select Preferences from Outlook Express's Edit menu. Click on the General tab and locate the section marked fonts. The last item allows you to specify the font used to print messages. You can select any font you like, and any size you like. I'd suggest Courier, 9 points, to be on the safe side.

Q How do I silence the voice that begins reading my screen? I can't find an option for no voice but only an array of miserable robot-style voices. I do not want my computer to read to me, at least not until there are better voices available.

Bebe Duffy

A There is perhaps nothing more annoying than the sudden chattering of your Macintosh with its monotonous robotic voice. Thankfully, there's an easy fix. Open the Speech control panel. You'll see a pop-up menu near the top of the window that appears. Select Talking Alerts from menu. To forever rid yourself of this nuisance, simply unclick the options to "Speak the phrase" and "Speak the alert text." Close the Speech control panel and continue your work in silence. MH

let us know!

Got a Mac problem that's driving you nuts? Let us take a crack at it. We'll answer questions of general interest to all readers. All mail is assumed intended for publication, and we reserve the right to edit questions for brevity and clarity. When sending your questions, include your full name and phone number. Send your questions to:

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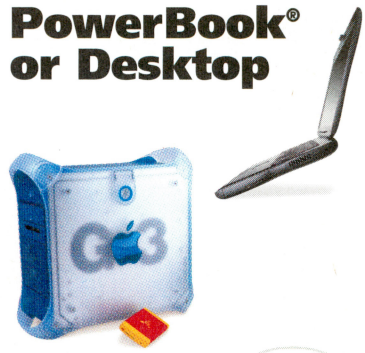

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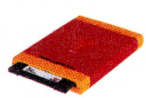

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By Chris McVeigh

Take a Memo

Macintosh Speech Recognition Comes of Age

IBM's ViaVoice has ushered in a new era of speech recognition on the Macintosh platform. Now, Mac users can dictate letters, articles, and essays in a relaxed, natural voice. Engineering has transformed science fiction into science fact.

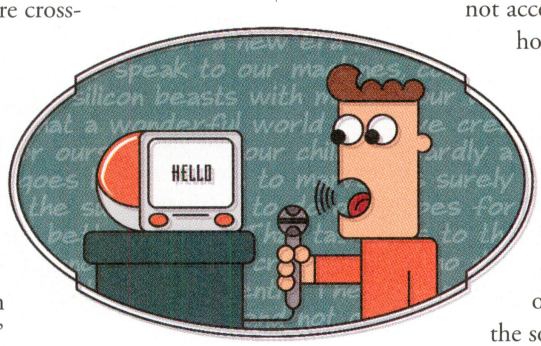
Slicing and Dicing Speech

When we speak, our vocal cords vibrate, causing the surrounding air molecules to compress and expand in time with the vibrations. This creates a sound wave that travels through the air. When the wave strikes a microphone, it causes the microphone's thin diaphragm to vibrate. These vibrations in turn cause an attached metal coil to move within a magnetic field, which creates an electrical current pulsing in time with the original vibrations. This current then travels to your Macintosh, where it is digitally sampled and visualized as a wavelength varying in frequency and amplitude.

The familiar sound of words and sentences are nothing but a meandering line to your Macintosh. Understanding the significance of subtle variations in this line's height, curvature, and repetition is the task facing voice recognition engineers.

Speech recognition works by breaking down speech into its constituent sounds, called "phonemes." Phonemes are the smallest, most basic sounds of language, which include all vowel, consonant and compound letter pronunciations. (The word "play," for example, contains four distinct phonemes: "puh," "luh," and "eh," and "yuh.") Each phoneme has a unique sound pattern, and by extension, a unique digital pattern.

As your voice streams into the computer, the speech recognition engine simplifies the sample into a series of patterns. Patterns are cross-referenced with the software's template of phonemes. Parts of the sample that closely resemble the template pattern of the sound "p" (puh) will be declared a match, and so on.



Tomāto or Tomăto?

One obstacle facing voice recognition engineers has been the fact that the sound of each phoneme varies slightly from person to person and region to region. The speech recognition engine must take these variances into account in order to be useful to more than one person (i.e., to detect variances in pitch and cadence). British or Australian inflections are problematic for programs intended for Americans.

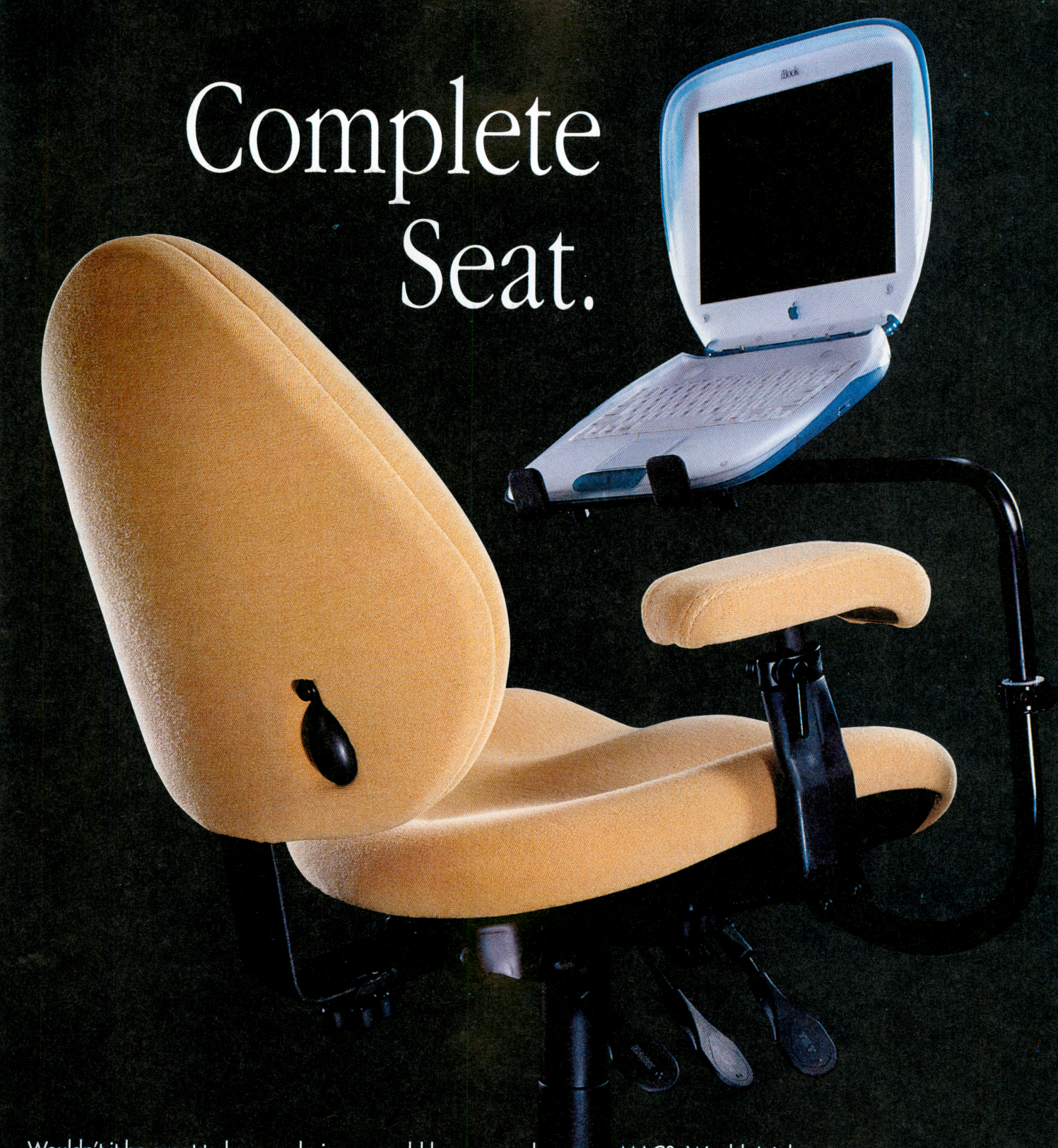
The fewer variables a speech recognition engine has to accommodate, the less the processing time and the less the likelihood of frequent and debilitating errors. Variables are narrowed first by specifying the language, and then by selecting a regional accent and dialect, and then by tailoring the speech recognition engine to your voice type through verbal training. Once the application is trained, the software is fine-tuned with error-correction routines.

Accuracy is improved through recognition by context. Deciphering speech phoneme by phoneme does not accommodate homonyms (words that sound alike but are spelled differently). Only by looking at the structure of a sentence can the software determine whether you said "your" or "you're." Such analysis can also make the difference between "I'd like that wrapped in advance" and "I'd like fat rat banana pants."

Still Cooking

Five years ago speech recognition was still a grand experiment, able to understand only a small library of verbal commands. Today, programs such as ViaVoice recognize speech in near real-time with a vocabulary of up to 260,000 words. And yet, despite these advances, the technology remains in its infancy. Speech recognition engines cannot yet recognize the speaker by the timbre and pitch of his voice, nor can they separate and independently recognize two or more overlapping voices. MH

CHRIS MCVEIGH



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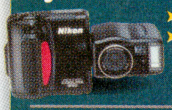

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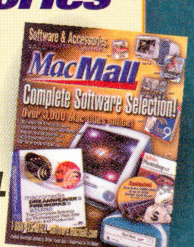

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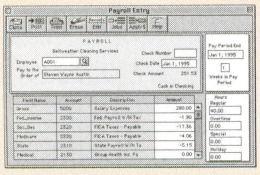

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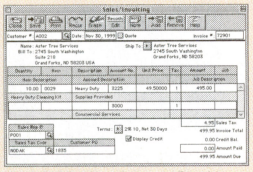

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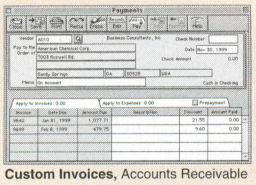

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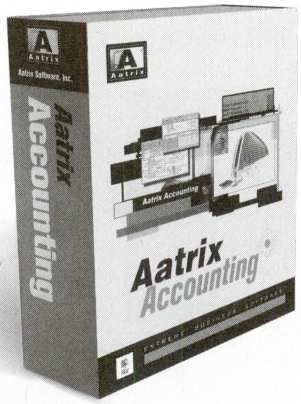

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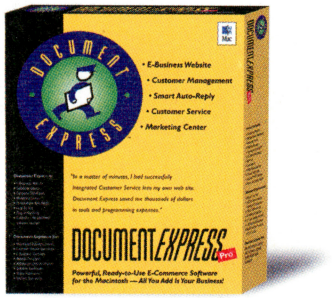

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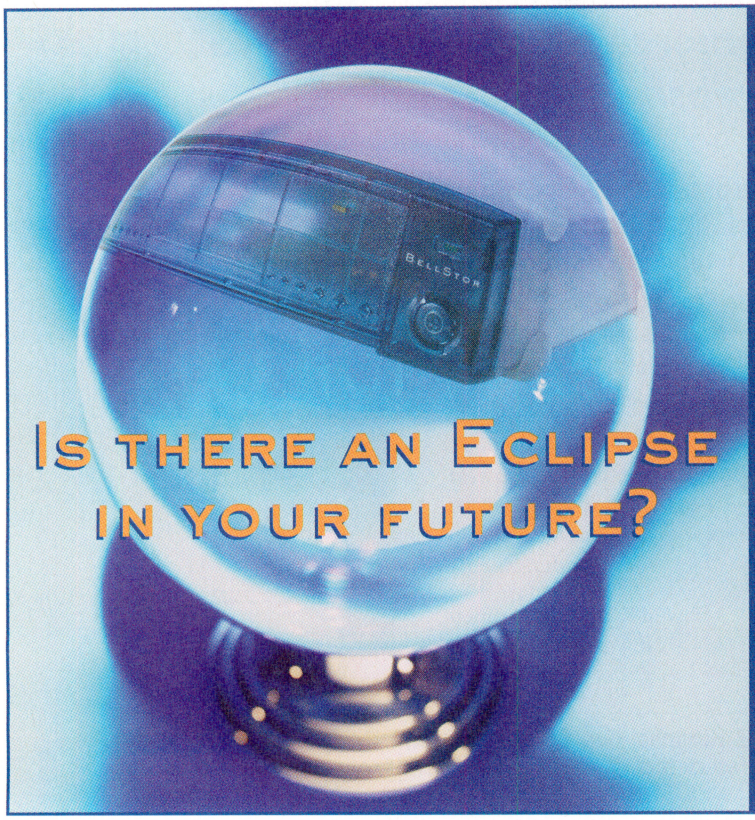

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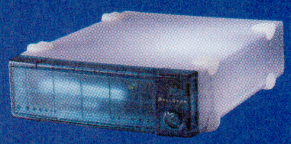

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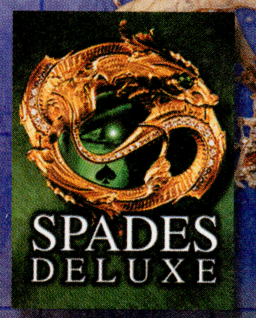

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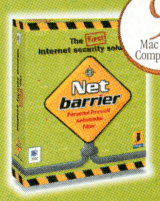

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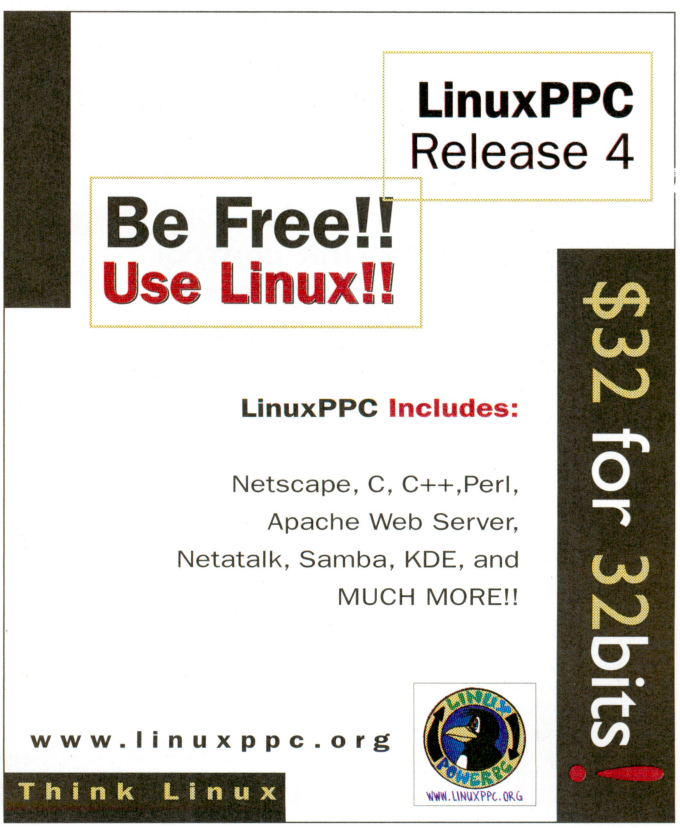
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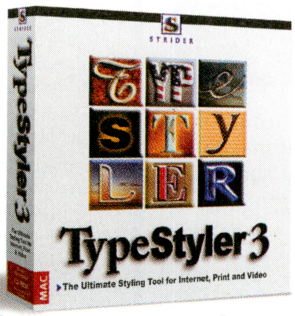

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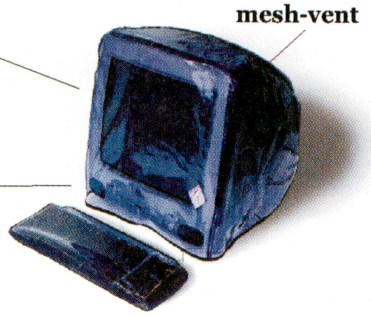

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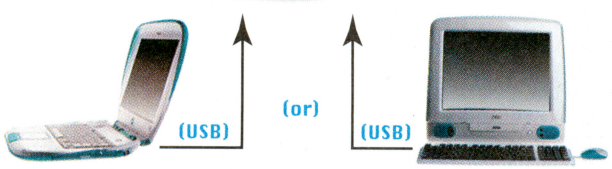

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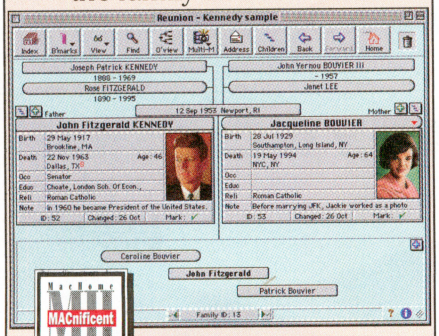

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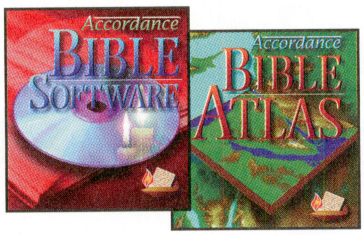

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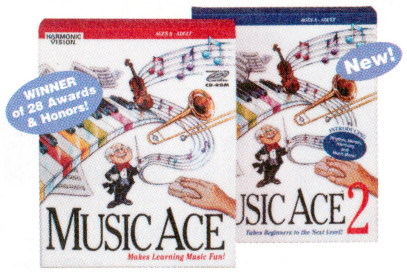

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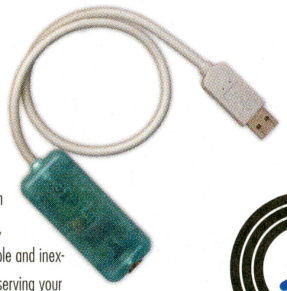

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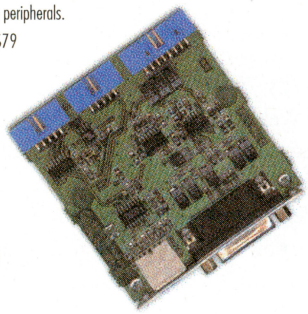

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ihnatko [Commentary]

By Andy Ihnatko

Apple History X

What it all means, maaaaan

Macworld Expo, San Francisco, January. During Steve Jobs' keynote address, Not Chairman Steve became Not Not Chairman Steve and MacOS X had its first public unveiling. I was in a TV studio being interviewed by a technology reporter when he suddenly realized that while he'd spent the interview referring to Apple's next big operating system as "OS Ten."

I had been consistently pronouncing the letter itself – which is its official and correct name, according to Apple. "What does it mean?" he asked me. "Why 'X'?"

This is what MacOS X will mean. 10. It's our first rollover. It's the first time we find ourselves, in a sense, back to zero and starting all over again.

Well, the best response would have been "Because the new OS is very much the computer industry's first Internet OS, and when people think of pornography, boom, they think of the Internet," but I wasn't sure how his producer would react. So I merely explained that it was a way to further distance the trademark from another company's ancient operating system name, and it symbolized the complete departure OS X represented from all previous incarnations of the Mac OS.

But Mac OS X does mean something. The year 2000 is, when you get down to it, just a number. The date has done the big rollover for the first time since the advertising community had the ability to sell us junk via a worldwide network of satellites, and that was really the only big deal about New Year's Y2K. Nonetheless, it was an occasion that put one in a reflective mood; I'm sure that you, like me, spent at least a few moments at the breakfast table on January 1 2000, looking at all of those zeroes in small type under the masthead of the morning newspaper and marveled: *My God, I'm living in the future.*

This is what Mac OS X will mean. 10. It's our first rollover. It's the first time we find ourselves, in a sense, back to zero and starting all over again. It's a time to consider that the past is over with and that it's time to begin living in the future.

X is big. It's not an upgrade; having seen it firsthand and had bits of it explained to me, I can say that Mac OS X is not based on previous versions of the Mac OS … it's merely inspired by them, in much the same way that a movie can have been obviously inspired by an Akira Kurasawa film without having a single thing in it that's specifically like *Rashomon* or *The Seven Samurai.* Whereas previous new Mac OS releases would use the source code of the previous OS, Mac OS X uses only their ideas, their motivations, the reasons why they seemed to work well in 8.5 or even 7.0.

We need an overhaul of the entire system. We need a new interface, no matter how cozy and familiar the old one is. We also need new system-level features and infrastructure, no matter how much existing software relies on the old ones, and we need new memory and networking architecture, even if it means that thousands of apps will have to be rewritten to take advantage of all this cool new junk.

And we need Mac OS X, no matter how many Macs get orphaned by it. From the fundamentals of crash-proof memory to the flourish of windows that ooze, these things need duty-cycles, and there just aren't enough of them in anything less than a G3 (or even a G4; Apple hasn't said yet). But while X will be the biggest separator of Haves from Have-Nots in Apple history, it's a necessary evil.

Previous versions of the Mac OS represent living in a comfortable and familiar past. Mac OS X will mean living in the future. And while no one can ever predict the challenges of the future, it's always a more exciting place to be. MH

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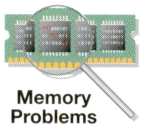

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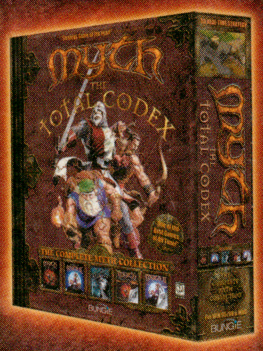

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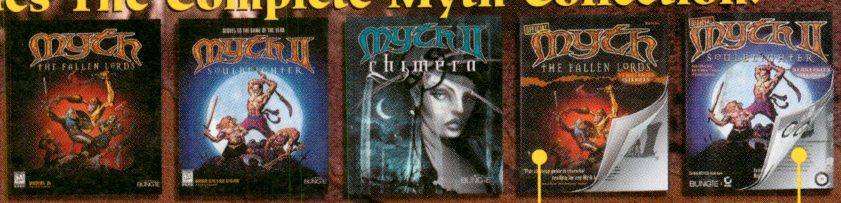

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